

***DEDICATED***

**TO**

**C. G. SHAH**

***Fountain of Inspiration  
to Generations of Marxist Intellectuals.***





## Preface

*Rural India in Transition* is a collection of papers prepared by me for different conferences, seminars and journals. It attempts to portray the changes that have been taking place in the agrarian social structure as a result of the measures adopted and implemented by the government of Independent India.

The Indian people constitute about one fifth of the humanity. They have the longest continuity of history. The Indian society has elaborated, in the course of its historical development, a complex network of social relationships which is quite unique. Under the British rule, it experienced a jolt which ushered in a qualitatively new road of its development. Its economic base, political structure and social organisation as well as its value system and norms expressed in its ideals and customs underwent a profound transformation. From a feudal society, it was transformed into a colonial underdeveloped capitalist society during the British rule. After achieving Independence, it embarked on a still newer phase of existence. The advent of Independence, however, took place during a phase in the world history when two different social systems have been competing with one another in the arena of the social world of man. These two systems are, as we know, the capitalist system (manifesting itself through various pure or mixed patterns, though fundamentally the same), and the socialist system (also manifesting itself in diverse patterns, though basically identical). Underdeveloped colonial countries which have been recently liberated from foreign imperialist domination are confronted with the crucial problem of choosing between two different roads of industrial and general economic and social development signified by those different systems.

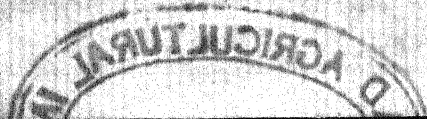
Like all underdeveloped countries, India is also overwhelmingly rural. With a view to transforming this underdeveloped and predominantly agrarian society into a highly developed industrial society, the Government of Independent India has evolved a specific economic policy which is founded on the postulates of mixed economy and capitalist functional

instead of socialist structural planning. This policy is embodied in its various industrial policy statements and Five Year Plans.

Indian rural society is being consciously transformed by numerous measures adopted by the governments of the Indian Union and its constituent States in consonance with the basic economic policy referred to above. Numerous studies of the results of these measures have been made by various agencies, both government and non-government. The transformation that has been taking place in the agrarian society is slowly emerging in basic outline.

In the process of my studies of Nationalism in India, it became necessary for me to cover considerable literature on Agrarian India. On the basis of this, I worked out a reference work—*Rural Sociology in India*, where the various studies have been selectively represented. It was while pursuing this literature that I developed a desire to crystallize my own thoughts regarding the main feature of the transformation process that has been taking place in the rural society. Fortunately, I got an opportunity to do so when I had to prepare papers for various conferences and seminars and had to write articles for some journals.

The ten chapters comprising this volume constitute a part of my studies. I intend to examine in greater details the social implications of land reforms, village panchayats, bhoodan and co-operatives. The present studies reveal that the rural change that is generated by the Government measures has resulted in sharpening the contradictions among various classes composing the rural society, which in the context of the caste and other institutional background, is unleashing tensions, antagonisms and conflicts which require to be properly comprehended. The studies also raise a very crucial problem. Can the Plans launched by the Government of Indian Union on the basis of the postulates of a mixed economy, private property in land, free enterprise in the domain of the agrarian economy, profit as the motive of production and competition in the market as the mechanism of realising this profit, really succeed in evolving a prosperous rural economy which would liquidate the immense poverty of



majority of the agrarian population composed of uneconomic holders of land, agricultural labourers and ruined artisans? The studies, on the contrary, indicate that agrarian programmes launched under the Plans are only strengthening the rich sections of the rural society. They mainly provide facilities for these strata which due to their superior economic and social power succeed in capturing various organs and institutions created to implement those programmes and plans and use them as additional weapons to advance their material interests at the expense of the poor strata of the agrarian population.

A thorough examination of this undesirable trend is urgently necessary. The economic fate not only of the rural people but of the entire Indian nation is involved in it. (An adequate understanding of the nature of the transition that has been taking place in the Indian rural society can also provide a correct perspective necessary for evolving methods and programmes appropriate for counteracting this harmful and dangerous trend.) If the present group of papers could stimulate a searching inquiry into the nature of this transition and if it can evoke a discussion with regard to the very basic postulates of the present Planning that has been operating in our country, the purpose of publishing the papers in the book form will be served. I am aware of my many limitations. However, if I succeed in irritating better scholars to more adequately explain the nature of the transition, I will feel fully awarded. "Criticism is the ozone of public life." Full and free discussion of the basic economic policies which have been shaping the destiny of a huge population of four hundred millions and whose repercussions are international, deserve comprehensive and profound critical evaluation. The present study, along with my other works, represents an endeavour to provoke abler people to launch such basic discussion.

"Rural Sociology : Its Need in India" was prepared as a Paper for the *Sociological Bulletin*. It is an abridged version of my ideas about rural sociology as expressed more elaborately in *Rural Sociology in India*. "Sociological Analysis of India" and "Sociological Problems of Economic Development" were papers published in the German Journal *Zeitschrift Für Die Gesamte Staatswissenschaft* which had issued a special number

on India. "Tribes in Transition" and "Community Development and Sarvodaya" were published in the special numbers of *Seminar*, "Community Development, a Sociological Analysis" was prepared as a Paper for a seminar organised under the auspices of the Indian Sociological Society and subsequently published in the *Sociological Bulletin*. "The Problem of Rural Indebtedness upto 1939 (Chapter 6)" was a pamphlet published during forties. "The Impact of Government Measures on the Life of Rural People" was submitted as a Paper at the third World Congress of Sociology and subsequently reprinted in its transactions. I am grateful to all these associations and journals for giving me an opportunity to study the problem from various angles and for permitting me to reprint them in this book form.

I am also grateful to a number of friends who continuously spurred me to proceed with my studies. In this connection, I must acknowledge my deep sense of gratitude to Dr. J. N. Barmeda whose stimulating discussions and comments helped me to clarify many of my ideas. I am also thankful to Dr. Hansa Sheth for helping me in going through this proofs and preparing the index. I also feel grateful to my young friend Shri Uday Mehta for helping me to prepare some papers. But for the warm and conscientious interest taken by Shri Ramdas Bhatkal of the Popular Book Depot this book would not have come out in its present elegant form. I am thankful to him and to the Popular Book Depot.

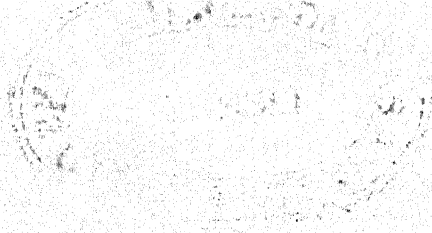
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## *Rural Sociology: Its Need in India*

### RURAL SOCIETY : NEED FOR ITS SYSTEMATIC STUDY

A systematic study of Rural Social Organization, its structure, function and evolution has become urgent today in India for a number of reasons.

- (1) Indian society is overwhelmingly rural. A study of Indian society is possible only if its predominant rural sector is comprehended in all its rich complexity.
- (2) Under the British impact, the agrarian structure—its economy, its polity, its familistic and caste basis—its ideology and its aesthetics had experienced a profound transformation.
- (3) Indian rural life provides a spectacle of acute misery, social disintegration, cultural backwardness and, above all, of an all-enveloping crisis.
- (4) The extensive participation of rural masses in the long drawn out national liberation struggle ; the devastating communal frenzy which swept over the rural world uprooting a great section of the village population; the deep ferment which is seething in the agrarian area and which frequently bursts out in varied forms of struggles between different classes and sections of the rural people; the numerous prejudices that are corroding the life of the rural people and which manifest themselves in various caste, linguistic, provincial, religious and other forms of tensions, antagonisms and conflicts; all these phenomena reveal that rural India is not inert. The seething cauldron of rural life is neither to be treated as a passive, quiet backpool of

urban society nor to be treated as an auxiliary appendage of the dazzling metropolis. It has to be studied in its own magnitude and significance.

- (5) Attempts to revitalize the rural life are meeting enormous obstacles. The struggle of scores and scores of individuals and institutions to reform one sector or the other of the rural life have been frustrated against an overall blindwall. Welfare workers on economic front find formidable political, social and educational hurdles in their way. Social reformers tumble over economic, political and cultural obstacles. (All these well-intentioned activities of rural workers either contradict each other or at best yield fragmentary one-sided results. Sectional cures and symptomatic treatments are usually proving worse than disease causing frustration among workers and engendering scepticism and cynicism, if not pessimism among them.)
- (6) After the achievement of Independence, the State is playing a very decisive and significant role in reconstructing rural society. A new conscious endeavour is being made to bring about an overall change in Rural Social Life.

To reconstruct rural society on a higher basis it is urgently necessary to study not only the economic forces but also the social, the ideological and other forces operating in that society.

Hitherto scholars, economists, politicians, social workers and others have given greater attention to the problem of the urban sector of the Indian social world. We have relatively, a considerable literature on the different facets of the urban life. Whatever studies have been made of the rural life are spasmodic, one-sided, sectional and mostly cursory. A synthetic, all-sided and interconnected account of the rural social life is not merely not available but even its sketchy outline is absent. No systematic study has still been launched to study the rural society in all its aspects, to study its life processes in their movement and further in their interconnections. It is a colossal task, full of complexity. In fact rural sociology in India or the science of the laws governing the specific Indian rural organism has still to be created.



Such a science is, however, the basic premise for the renovation of Indian society as a whole.

### DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL SOCIOLOGY

Rural Sociology or the Science of the laws of development of rural society in general has come into being only recently.

Reflections on Rural society are as old as the rural society itself. Shrewd observations on various aspects of rural life are available from very early times. However, systematic observations on the history of the origin and the transformation of rural society have begun only since about the middle of the nineteenth century. The impact of the capitalist industrial civilisation upon the rural economy and the social structure in various parts of the world forced the attention of scholars to the study of the trends of rural social development. Olufsen, Maurer, Maine, Hexthausen, Gierke, Elton, Stemmann, Innes, Coulanges, Nasse, Laveleye, Baden Powell, Ashley Pollock, Maitland, Lewinsky, Seeborn, Gomme, Guiraud, Jubainville, Slater, Vinogradoff, Meitson and others have been some of the outstanding scholars who have thrown great light on the rural society from various angles.

Subsequently eminent scholars, professors and others interested in the phenomena of the rural life have published in various countries enormous material dealing with its various aspects.

However, rural sociology as an organised discipline consciously developed is of very recent origin. Its pre-requisites were evolved in the U.S.A. during what is called the "Exploiter Period" of American Society (1890-1920) a period when American Rural Society witnessed all round decay.

The Report of the Country Life Commission appointed by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1907, the doctorate theses by J. M. Williams, W. H. Wilson, and N. L. Sims, and a group of rural church and school studies were the three streams which provided nourishment for the emergence of Rural Sociology.

"Rural Sociology" by Prof. J. M. Gillette published in 1916 was the first college text-book on the subject.

Subsequently, the literature on the subject grew both in the U.S.A. and other parts of the world. The publication of "A Systematic Source Book in Rural Sociology" in 1930 regarded as "epoch making" contributed decisively to accelerate the advance of Rural Sociology. The founding of the journal "Rural Sociology" in 1935 and the establishment of "Rural Sociological Society of America" in 1937 were further landmarks in its growth. In the U.S.A., Rural Sociology, inspite of its immaturity, is being developed by more than 800 professors and research workers.

It is spreading in other countries also. Various international organisations which emerged in the present century like the League of Nations, the I.L.O. the F.A.O., U.N.O., UNESCO and others have and are contributing to the rapid advance of Rural Sociology.

Such in brief is the history of the emergence of Rural Sociology, the youngest among the social sciences. And like every young science and particularly a social science there is a lot of controversy about its scope.

#### SCOPE OF RURAL SOCIOLOGY

Inspite of fierce controversies that are going on among the Rural Sociologists about the exact scope of the science, all of them agree on the following basic points :

- (i) Though the rural life and the urban life interact, each segment is sufficiently distinct from the other ;
- (ii) Rural and urban settings exhibit characters which are peculiar and specific, distinguishing one from the other ;
- (iii) The prime objective of Rural Sociology should be to make a scientific, systematic and comprehensive study of the rural social organisation, of its structure, function and objective tendencies, of development on the basis of such a study, to discover its laws of development.

#### SCOPE OF RURAL SOCIOLOGY IN INDIA

To consciously develop the science of Rural society in India, it is necessary to approach the rural phenomena simultaneously

from many angles. Various significant aspects of rural life have to be studied in their interconnections. A synthetic approach to rural society alone will lay the foundations of this science, so necessary for the effective and all-sided improvement of the rural world. Seeking guidance from the explorations by eminent scholars in this branch in other countries, we will briefly suggest the lines of studies which may be undertaken to this effect.

#### DIFFERENT TYPES OF VILLAGE AGGREGATES

The village is the unit of the rural society. It is the theatre where the quantum of rural life unfolds itself and functions. Like every social phenomena, the village is a historical category. The emergence of the village at a certain stage in the evolution of the life of man, its further growth and development in subsequent periods of human history, the varied structural changes it experienced during thousands of years of its existence, the rapid and basic transformation it has undergone during the last hundred and fifty years since the Industrial Revolution—all these constitute a very fascinating and challenging study.

Eminent sociologists have advanced a number of criteria to classify village communities.

(1) According to one criterion, the village aggregates have been classified according to the type which evolved during the transition from Man's nomadic existence to settled village life viz., (a) the migratory agricultural villages, where the people live in fixed abodes only for a few months; (b) the semi-permanent agricultural villages where the population resides for a few years and then migrates due to the exhaustion of the soil; and (c) the permanent agricultural villages where the settled human aggregates live for generations and even centuries.<sup>1</sup>

(2) According to the second criterion, sometimes called Ecological criterion, villages have been classified into grouped (or nucleated) villages and dispersed villages. This distinction is considered vital by these sociologists because each type of habitat furnishes a different framework of social life. The nucleated village is marked by "proximity, contact, com-

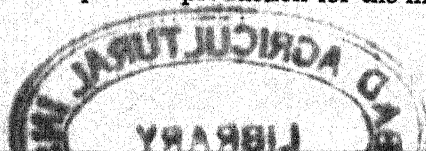
munity of ideas and sentiments", while in dispersed habitats, "everything bespeaks separation, everything marks the fact of dwelling apart."<sup>2</sup>

(3) The third criterion adopted to classify the village aggregates is that of social differentiation, stratification, mobility and landownership. Six broad groupings of village aggregates have been made on the basis of this criterion : viz., (a) that composed of peasant joint owners ; (b) that composed of peasant joint tenants ; (c) that composed of farmers, who are mostly individual owners but also include some tenants and labourers; (d) that composed of individual farmer tenants; (e) that composed of employees of great private landowners, and finally (f) that composed of labourers and employees of the state, the church, the city or the public landowner.<sup>3</sup>

A systematic classification of the Indian village aggregates on the basis of the above criteria—an exhaustive survey of Indian villages co-relating the villages classified according to these norms, and a study of their history will provide valuable information about village communities in India, about varied types of social institutions which have come into being in rural India and also about the complex cultural patterns which have influenced and have been influencing the life processes of the rural Indian people. Further it will help to disclose the laws of the peculiar developments of Indian village communities and will assist rural workers to evolve scientific programme of rural reconstruction.

#### STUDY OF LARGER RURAL REGIONS

The study of the emergence of larger rural regions is one of the most baffling problems confronting the student of rural society. The factors which have combined to evolve homogeneous rural regions demand a very careful examination. Again, it is found that the larger rural regions change their characteristics with the change in the techno-economic, socio-economic and socio-political forces. The epoch of self-sufficiency evolved one category of regions. Under the impact of Industrial Revolution and capitalists production for the market a totally new



group of areas came into being. The change from market economy to planned economy where the agrarian sector is consciously developed as a part of the total life of the community is creating in some countries a new type of regional units. And above all, the gigantic development of productive forces, which is evolving an international economic and cultural community, in the modern epoch is forcing the students of human society and specially rural society to discover the appropriate variety of rural regions which will be in consonance with this development. Efforts are being made to define economic, linguistic, administrative, religious and cultural regions in various countries. Efforts are also being made to find out where these regions coincide and also to study the laws which bring about this concurrence.

The work of anthropologists, regional sociologists, scholars dealing with geographical factors and others has thrown considerable light on the phenomena of the development of such zones.

On the basis of the findings of these studies, a detailed map of India indicating various natural and economic regions indicating the areas inhabited by populations living in various stages of economic development, showing linguistic regions including regions based on different dialects as well as different variations of main languages and showing further religious regions based on different religious beliefs prevailing among the people, will throw great light on some of the most burning problems of Indian society. It will also assist those engaged in the difficult task of reforming rural society to locate some of the most fundamental causes of the present crisis of that Society.

### RURAL PEOPLE

A systematic study of Rural people, its birth and death rate, its density, its proportion to urban people, its age and sex composition and its general health, longevity and diseases is of primary importance. Caste, race, nationality and the linguistic and religious composition of the people also has great significance. This gives rise to a rich complex and diversified social



life and varied patterns of culture. More often it breeds animosities, antagonisms and conflicts. The emergence of ghastly communal Hindu-Muslim riots are still shudderingly vivid in our minds. The growing nationality and caste conflicts which are slowly corroding the body politic of India also reveal the same truth.

A co-ordinated and inter-related study of the rural people from all these angles is urgently necessary to erect a solid foundation of Rural Sociology.

### ECONOMIC LIFE OF RURAL PEOPLE

Since economic production is the basic activity of a human aggregate, the mode of production (productive forces and social relations of production) plays a determining role in the shaping of the social structure, the psychology and the ideology of that human aggregate; Rural Society is based predominantly on agriculture. Land is the basic means of production in the countryside. The economic life of Rural Society has to be studied from a number of angles. Rural sociologists are increasingly paying attention to the following aspects of economic life :

(a) *Motif of production* :—Hitherto this aspect has been much neglected. Whether the agricultural production has for its objective the direct satisfaction of the subsistence needs of the rural aggregate or is carried on for the market and profits of the producers who do not themselves consume their products or whether it is adapted to the consciously assessed needs of the community—all these aspects require a proper comprehension. For instance, in pre-British India, village agriculture mainly produced for meeting the needs of the village population. This subsistence village economy which was considerably shaken during the British period, created in its wake a veritable revolution in the rural social organisation.

(b) *Techniques of production* : The second aspect from which the study of the economic life of the rural people should be made is through the investigation into the character of the technique of production used by the rural aggregate for the pur-

pose of agriculture. Three broad categories of technical cultures have been located. (i) Hoe Culture, (ii) Plough Culture, (iii) The higher technical cultural phase of tractors and fertilizers. The first generally excludes the use of draft animals or any kind of power. The plough is worked with the aid of the draft animals. The tractor eliminates even the necessity of draft animals and is propelled by oil or other power. The technique of production determines the productivity of labour as well as the extent of the material wealth of the rural society. It also determines the division of labour among the members of the society.

(c) *Land relations and their role* :—The vital significance of land or property relations in the economic and general social life of the rural people is increasingly being realised by students of rural society. The property relations determine, on one side, as to who shall control and direct the processes of production and, on the other, as to who will regulate the shares of various socio-economic groups associated with agriculture from the total agricultural wealth. As a consequence it becomes responsible for the degree of enthusiasm and interest of various groups bound up with agriculture in the process of production. It also plays a decisive role in determining the homogeneity or heterogeneity of the rural population. By regulating the share of the material wealth of various sections, the land relations also specify the relative weight of those sections in the social, political and cultural life of rural society. The nature of property relations also decides the degree of stability and social harmony in the agrarian area. The history of past and present rural societies reveals how numerous mighty struggles had their genetic cause in the property relations. The question of land relations has become the crucial question in all backward countries of the world today.

All these indicate the necessity of studying the nature of property relations to grasp the present state and future tendencies of rural society.

(d) *Standard of life* :—The problem of the standard of life of the rural population has been keenly studied by eminent sociologists like Sorokin, Zimmerman, Sims, Kirkpatrick and

others. The criteria and the methods laid down by them for such a study can serve as a useful guide to the students of rural society in India.

From any criteria of the standard of life, the Indian people suffer from the most acute poverty. The immense poverty of the Indian agriculturist is proverbial and presents the fundamental problem of the programme of national reconstruction.

### RURAL FAMILY

According to some thinkers, family and familism impress their stamp on the entire rural structure. Familism, according to these thinkers, during the subsistence phase of village economy provides the gestalt to the rural society. "All the other social institutions and fundamental social relationships have been permeated by, and modelled according to, the patterns of rural family relationships."<sup>4</sup> The following eight traits found in the rural society of pre-capitalist phase are broadly considered as signs of familism :—(1) Marriage, earlier and its higher rate; (2) Family, unit of social Responsibility; (2) Family, basis of norms of Society; (4) Family providing norms of political organization; (5) Co-operative rather than the Contractual Relations; (6) Family, Unit of Production, Consumption and Exchange; (7) Dominance of family cult and ancestor worship; (8) Dominance of tradition.

Until the impact of Industrial Revolution and competitive capitalist market economy, familism was the heart of village communities. Subsistence agrarian economics and rural societies based on them were familistic through and through. The rise and development of modern industries steadily undermined subsistence agrarian economy and brought the rural economy within the orbit of capitalist market economy. This transformation together with the growing pressure of various urban forces brought about the increasing disintegration of the old rural society. The rural society, too, more and more lost its familistic traits.

The Indian rural society provides a classic field for the study of rural family. It probably contains at present within



itself all the four categories of institutions which are described by Prof. Rivers as types of family institutions viz., the clan, the matrilineal joint family, the patrilineal joint family and the individual family composed of parents and minor children.<sup>5</sup> The third type, the patrilineal joint family, is mostly considered as the classic type corresponding to the phase of agricultural economy based on the plough and the domestication of animals and essentially producing for subsistence. The patrilineal joint family, which also predominantly shaped the family structure of Indian rural society prior to the impact of British rule and capitalist economic forces in India, possessed the following characteristics : (1) Greater homogeneity, (2) Based on peasant household, (3) Greater discipline and inter discipline, (4) dominance of family ego, (5) Authority of father, (6) Closer participation in various activities.

During the last hundred and fifty years, the traditional joint family and familistic rural framework have been undergoing a great transformation. From status to contract ; from rule of custom to the rule of law ; from family as a unit of production to family as a unit of consumption ; from family having its cementing bond in consanguinity to family having it in conjugality ; from family being an omnibus social agency to that as a specialised reproductive and affectional unit shorn of most of its economic, political, medical religious and other social and cultural functions ; from a massive joint family composed of members belonging to a number of generations to a tiny unit composed of husband, wife and unmarried children ; all this change is steadily taking place in the rural family, denuding rural society of its familism as its Gestalt and creating a veritable revolution in rural social frame-work in India.

A systematic study of rural family, its types, its transitions, its structural and functional changes has never become so necessary as at present in India. It will assist the social workers to evolve appropriate programmes for rural reconstruction. It also will help the students of rural society to locate the laws of the transformation of one of the most classical familistic civilisations that has emerged in the history of humanity.

## CASTE SYSTEM IN RURAL INDIA

A very peculiar type of social grouping which is found in India is the caste grouping. In India, caste largely determines the function, the status, the available opportunities as well as the handicaps for an individual. Caste differences even determine the differences in modes of domestic and social life, also types of house and cultural patterns of the people which are found in the rural area. Even landownership exists frequently on caste lines. Due to a number of reasons, administrative functions have also been often divided according to caste, especially in the rural area. Caste has, further shaped the pattern of the complicated religious and secular culture of the people. It has fixed the psychology of the various social groups and has evolved such minutely graded levels of social distance and superior inferior relationships that the social structure looks like a gigantic hierarchic pyramid.

This institution which provided a framework of social equilibrium to Hindu society is undergoing great changes in modern times. It is experiencing in fact the powerful impact of numerous economic, political, ideological and other forces. It is subjected mortal blows from these forces. It is in an increasing state of decay. However, even in its death-agonies it is still having its grip over the rural social life.<sup>6</sup>

One of the most important tasks before the student of rural society in India is to evolve an approach which will be able to appraise its social and cultural processes within the matrix of the Caste structure. Failure to develop such a perspective had, in spite of an immense accumulation of economic and other factual data obstructed the elaboration of a living composite picture of rural society. A systematic study of caste system and its relations with other aspects of rural life is urgently necessary. It could be done fruitfully on the following lines :

- (1) Caste and Economic life. It will include (a) caste and production, (b) caste and ownership, (c) caste and consumption, (d) caste and indebtedness, (e) caste and standard of living, (f) caste and habitat, (g) caste and mobility and others;
- (2) Caste and Family life; (3) Caste and Educational life; (4)

Caste and Religious life; (5) Caste and Political life; (6) Caste and the Value system of the community; (7) Caste and types of Rural leadership; (8) Mutual attitude of caste groups; (9) Castes as a laboratory to study Social Distance; (10) Impact of New Constitution on Caste; (11) Caste and Hinduism; (12) Caste, Joint family and Village community, their inter-relationship and interdependence; (13) Doctrine of Castism and Brahminic Supremacy.

To properly unravel the causes of the Octopus like stranglehold of the caste system is very urgent for the proper comprehension of the life processes of rural society in India and also for the laying down the lines of its future development. A systematic study of the origin, the development, the disorganization and its recent slow but definite disintegration is vital to unlock the mysteries that envelop the history of Indian rural society in particular and the Indian society in general. The science of rural society in India will not mature till proper implications of the role of this institution are measured.

#### POLITICAL LIFE OF THE RURAL PEOPLE

One of the vital problems that require to be intelligently studied by the rural sociologist is the political life of the rural populaion. Hitherto, very little attention has been paid to his aspect of the rural life. However, as seen earlier, the active energetic and sometimes stormy participation of the rural people in political life in various countries including India has exploded the myth of passivity and inertness of the rural people. In fact the growth of political consciousness among peasant populations and their increasing political activities is one of the striking features of the life of mankind to-day. In India, its study has become very urgent first because, the constitution of Independent India has provided universal adult suffrage to the Indian people and secondly because, unlike during the pre-British period, the State at present plays a very decisive and all-pervading role in the life of the Indian people.

A systematic study of the rural political life may be fruitfully made on the following lines :—

- (1) The study of the governmental machinery in the rural area.
- (2) The study of non-governmental political organizations in the rural area.
- (3) The study of the political behaviour of the rural people and its various sections.

The study of the governmental machinery which could be done at village level as well as at the level of large units raises the following problems : (a) How far the administrative machinery is responsible to the opinions and wishes of the people ; (b) how far the people are associated with it and participate in its functioning ; and (c) how far it is cheap, efficient and sensitive to the problems of the people.

The study of non-governmental political organizations demands a close analysis of the rise, growth, decay and disappearance of various political parties, indicating the trends of political moods of the rural people. The study of the political behaviour of the rural people includes, on the one hand, the study of various programmes which various strata of the rural people strive to fulfil. This study indicates the aspirations and dreams, immediate needs and ideologies of the rural people. On the other hand, the rural sociologist should study the various methods which the rural people adopt to realize their dreams aspirations and needs. The following methods are considered important from the sociological point of view : (1) Petitioning ; (2) Voting ; (3) Demonstrations and Marches ; (4) Hijrats or mass emigrations ; (5) Satyagraha, Passive Resistance ; (6) No-rent, No-tax campaigns ; (7) Spontaneous Elemental Revolts ; (8) Guerilla Warfare ; (9) Organized Armed Struggles.

Indian rural society provides a classical laboratory for the study of a rich variety of these methods.

The role of land relations and caste in rural politics of India is still insufficiently realized.

#### RURAL RELIGION

A thorough study of rural religion and its significant role in determining the life processes of the rural society should form

an essential part of the study of that society for a number of reasons.

(1) It is observed, all over the world, that the rural people have greater predisposition for religion than what the urban people have. (2) The religious outlook of the rural people overwhelmingly determines their intellectual, emotional and practical life. This is particularly true of the societies resting on subsistence basis. (3) In Societies based on subsistence economies, the leadership of village life in all domains was provided by the priestly group, in India the Brahmins. (4) The new developments which took place in India in modern times after the advent of the British rule and particularly after the emergence of a State wedded to secularism viz., the new economic and political environs, new norms basically non-religious and secular and derived out of a liberal democratic philosophy have been struggling to supersede the old ones founded on religion. The contemporary rural society in India has become a battleground of struggle between forces of religious orthodoxy and authoritarian social conceptions on the one hand and those of secular democratic advance on the other.

The study of rural religion from the following three aspects has proved useful in other countries and would bear great fruits in India also.

(1) Rural religion as providing a specific world outlook. It consists of such ingredients as (a) magical conceptions, (b) animism, (c) the conception of a bizzare world peopled by spirits, (d) the conception of a posthumous world of dead ancestors who have to be worshipped, and (e) mythology.

(2) Rural religion as a body of practices consisting of prayers, sacrifices and rituals.

(3) Rural religion as an institutional complex.

Rural religion which is composed of numerous sects and cults is considerably institutionalized. There are national, provincial and local organizations with Temples, Maths, Ashramas, with huge properties and organized staffs of priests and preachers.

One distinguishing mark of the Indian society which deserves to be studied was the absence of state religions, in contrast to



Christianity or even Islam in other parts of the world. The significant role of Bhaktas as sponsors of great democratic mass movement for religious social and other reforms also needs to be studied.

The study of rural religion, with its regional variants will assist considerably in evolving a composite picture of the past cultural evolution of the Indian people. It will also help the student of the rural society to comprehend the nature of transformation that is taking place in the ideology, the institutions, the rituals, the ethics and the aesthetics of the rural people under the pressure of new material and cultural forces.

### AESTHETIC CULTURE OF THE RURAL PEOPLE

Aesthetic culture is an integral part of the total culture of a society. It expresses, in art terms, the ideals, the aspirations, the dreams, the values and the attitudes of its people, just as its intellectual culture reveals its knowledge of the natural and social worlds which surround them.

A systematic study of the aesthetic culture of the Indian rural society in its historical movement of the dissolution of old types and the emergence of new ones, is vital for the study of the changing pattern of the cultural life of the rural people. Further since art reflects social life and its changes such a study will help the rural sociologists to comprehend the movement of the rural society itself as it progressed from its past shape to its present one. It will also reveal the changes in the psychological structures of the rural groups and sub-groups. Eminent sociologists have enumerated the following principal arts comprising the aesthetic culture of rural society. (1) Graphic arts such as drawing, painting, engraving and others which have two dimensional forms. (2) Plastic Arts which involve "the manipulation of materials to yield three dimensional forms that is to say carving and modelling in high and low relief and in the round." (3) Folklore comprised of "myths, tales, proverbs, riddles, verse together with music." (4) Dance and Drama which combine the three forms mentioned above and therefore are "synthetic Arts".<sup>1</sup>

Eminent students have located a number of characteristics of the aesthetic culture of the rural people living in a society based on subsistence economy. The following are important among them :—(1) Art was fused with life; (2) People as a whole took part in artistic activities; (3) Art was predominantly familistic; (4) The technique of art was simple; (5) Art had agrarian processes as its mains content; (6) Art creations were predominantly collective creations and collective in spirit; (7) Art was non-commercial; (8) Artistic craftsmanship and culture were transmitted from generation to generation orally.<sup>8</sup>

Under the impact of modern technological, economic, political, social and ideological forces, these characteristic of rural art are undergoing great changes.

The enormous rich material comprising the rural aesthetic culture has to be first assembled, analysed and classified. The next task is to interpret it with deep historical imagination and sociological insight. This alone will assist the student of rural society to arrive at a living objective picture of the rural society and the rural life as they existed in the past. This is specially necessary because no detailed written history of the past society is available. It is also essential for the Indian rural sociologist to study the aesthetic culture of the contemporary rural Indian people and the transformation it is undergoing. Such a study will enable him to comprehend the transformation of the life of the rural people and their struggle, dreams and aspirations.

### CHANGING RURAL WORLD

Like all other phenomena, the rural society too has been changing since its emergence. Its technology, economy and social institutions ; its ideology, art and religion ; have undergone a ceaseless change. This change is sometimes imperceptibly slow, sometimes strikingly rapid and at some moments even qualitative in character resulting in the transformation of one type of rural society into another.

To discern change in a system, to recognise its direction, to understand the subjective and objective forces which bring it about and further to consciously accelerate the process of

change by helping the progressive trends within the changing system—this constitutes a scientific approach to and active creative intervention in the life of a system.

### RURAL CHANGE, FACTORS RESPONSIBLE

Close investigators of rural society have enumerated a number of forces and factors, conscious or unconscious, which bring about change in rural society.<sup>10</sup> The following are the principal among them; (1) Natural factors like floods, earthquakes, famines etc. (2) Technological factor. The invention of new tools, new means of transport and communications and discovery of new materials produce profound changes even beyond the calculations of the inventors.

Along with these factors, there are also methods and devices adopted by social groups and organisations to consciously bring about the alteration or transformation of the rural world. The following are chief among them : (1) Persuasive method : This method popularizes the need of various changes. The protagonists do not participate in or initiate implementing the programme. (2) Demonstrative method : This method is known as propaganda by example or deed. (3) "Compulsory" method: The state often intervenes and through legislation brings about changes in rural life. It is not the will and initiative of the people but of the State that determine and accomplish these changes. (4) Method of social pressure : This method which is adopted by a rural individual, a group or a class to achieve a desired change includes petitioning, passive resistance, individual or group Satyagraha, processions and marches, strikes and demonstrations even individual terrorism, mass rebellions, revolutions and others. (5) Contact method: "It is generally recognised that one of the most effective methods of social change is found in contact of cultures... where peoples of different cultures come in touch with one another, cross fertilization takes place."<sup>11</sup> (6) Educational method : A group of social thinkers invest the educational method with decisive importance in bringing about the rural change.



All these methods should be carefully studied to evolve a programme of rural reform or reconstruction. Also its study is necessary to evaluate the forces that work to overhaul the rural social structure.

### RURAL SOCIAL WORK, ITS PRINCIPAL WEAKNESS

Enormous energy of individuals, groups and associations is spent in the movement of rural uplift and reconstruction. However, due to a lack of synthetic perspective and integrated outlook the efforts suffer from numerous drawbacks. Exclusive one-sided concentration on one aspect of rural life, predominantly emotional bias, lack of co-ordination of work, insufficient ability to assess the results and above all an absence of a proper sociological perspective are the major defects leading to either ineffectiveness or partial success.

Rural sociology will help the rural worker to make a diagnosis of its ills and will, thereby enable him to evolve a correct prescription (a scientific programme) to overcome these ills.

Here comes the decisive creative role of rural sociology which is as indispensable for the purpose of rural reconstruction as the science of medicine is to a medical practitioner.

### SOME UNFORTUNATE TENDENCIES

The present paper has the aim first, of emphasizing the vital need of studying the life processes of the rural society analytically and synthetically; secondly, of suggesting some of the appropriate lines of approach of such a study; and thirdly, of indicating what enormous research and theoretical labour are necessary to get a proper insight into the process of structural and functional transformations the rural society has experienced in the past and in the present.

It is, however, painful to record that our authorities who are today interested in transforming rural society have not realized the significance of such sociological approach to rural society. The Planning Commission does not still find it essential to asso-

ciate sociologists in their panel of advisers. The Union and State Governments have not still felt it necessary to organize or finance on a significant scale sociological studies of rural life. Sociology is still treated as cinderella among social sciences. Our seats of culture, our universities and research institutions still do not realize the need to positively encourage this subject as a vital pre-requisite of education.

### RURAL SOCIOLOGY—ITS URGENT NEED

Indian rural social structure is passing through an acute crisis. The crisis is enveloping every aspect of rural life. A comprehensive insight for a proper assessment of the specific weight and role of various factors whose action and inter-action provide movement to the rural society is essential if effective and progressive action is to be undertaken.

The unplanned and segmental approach to the problem of analysing and transforming the rural society requires to be replaced by a planned and integrated approach.

The need for developing Rural Sociology in India is overdue and indispensable.

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### KALEIDIOSCOPIC SOCIAL LANDSCAPE

The achievement of Independence of India was a great landmark in the history of the Indian Society. However, the way in which Independence was granted, the shape which free India acquired, and the problems which the Indian Union was confronted with were unique.

Socially, India has been one of the most complex countries. It has a continuity of history and cultural heritage which extends back to millenniums. It is a country which has probably the largest number of pre-historic tribes. It has been a stage on which an immense drama of contact and conflict, fusion and fission, of a number of ethnic stocks, primitive tribes belonging to all stages of development, civilized communities and religious and linguistic groups has been enacted with an intensity and duration, probably unparalleled in any country except China. Its heritage includes legacy from Paleolithic and Neolithic groups, from civilized societies speaking the Dravidian Branch of language, from the Indo-Aryan stocks, from the Huns, the Saks, the Scythians, the Bactrians, the Greeks, the Muslims, the Christians and others. It has witnessed the growth of systems of social organization like the caste, the joint family and the village communities based on self-sufficient village economy, and also of diverse types of feudal order and variegated feudal culture which are unique and which have left impression, may have determined to a great extent the specific contour of the contemporary social organization.

Indian social landscape has been kaleidoscopic because of its changing pattern across ages.

Unless this unique past and its legacy are properly comprehended, it will be difficult to understand the complicated process of the economic, political, social, cultural and ideological developments, that have been taking place in the Indian Union after Independence.

However, for a proper study of the economic, political, social, institutional, cultural and ideological problems confronting the Indian people, it is necessary, as a first step, to acquaint ourselves with the composition of the population of the Indian Union. A systematic analysis and study of the population of the Indian Union from various angles, therefore, is pre-requisite to properly appreciate the scope, the scale and the depth of the process of transformation of the life process of this immense section of mankind.

The present essay represents an attempt to make a brief analysis of the population of the Indian Union from various angles with a view to providing a background on the basis of which the numerous social currents and cross-currents that are agitating the extant Indian society may be adequately comprehended.

We will first draw a statistical picture of India's population from various angles. We will then indicate from that analysis some of the principal forces which provide momentum to the Indian society.

#### INDIAN HUMANITY

India, next to China, is the world's most populous country. According to the Census of 1951, it has a population of 35,68,29,485 human beings. The population is further increasing at an average rate of 13 per thousand per annum. The average density of population in India is 312 per sq. mile though varying considerably from State to State. On an average, India has 947 females for every 1000 males.

Ethnologically, most of the major types of ethnic groups of mankind are represented in the country. According to physical

appearance, as indicated in India Year Book 1956 the following five types could be easily distinguished: (a) The Negritos of the Andaman Islands, having physical affinity with Asian and oceanic peoples like Semangs of Malaya, and Papuans of New Guinea, but not with the African Negroes or Negritos; (b) The Veddis or Proto-Australians—majority of the tribal peoples of the Central and Southern India. Genetically, they are supposed to be related to the Australians and the Europeans; (c) The Mongoloids found in the mountain zones of North and North-East India; (d) The Mediterraneans of Melanids are found in the plains of South India. Generally, the word Dravidian was used for these groups incorrectly; (e) The Indids are found mainly in North India, Central Deccan and the West Coast. Genetically and physically, they are considered by Anthropologists as forming a part of the South European Stock.

Broadly, the Indid type predominates in North India and Melanid type in South India. However, it should be remembered that the Indian population has emerged from the intermingling of these various ethnic groups. Physical Anthropologists, Ethnologists, Culture historians and linguists are trying to evolve a picture of the Indian society and its complex culture traits on the basis of correlating the cultures and languages of the Indian people with these ethnic stocks and thereby trace the positive interactions as well as frictions which have been occurring even today as a result of the still advancing process of interliving of these groups. Interesting insights are being elaborated to study Indian history from this type of analysis

#### INDIA, OVERWHELMINGLY RURAL

India is overwhelmingly rural. Out of 35.7 crores of people inhabiting the territory, 29.5 crores or 82.7 per cent live in 5,58,089 villages. Only 17.3 per cent, i.e. 5.2 crores, have urban setting provided by some 3,018 towns. It should be further noted that the overwhelming majority of the villages, viz., 3,80,020 of them contain less than 500 persons. We will refer to the implications of this rural setting subsequently.

## PREDOMINANCE OF JUVENILES, CHILD MARRIAGES

The Table I portrays the distribution of population according to age, sex and civil conditions :—

TABLE I  
POPULATION ACCORDING TO AGE, SEX AND CIVIL CONDITIONS

Age group	(in thousands)							
	Total		Unmarried		Married		Widowed or divorced	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Below 1 yr.	5821	5,668	5,821	5,668	—	—	—	—
1-4 years	17,939	17,908	17,908	17,908	—	—	—	—
5-14 years	44,703	41,989	41,804	35,737	2,833	6,118	66	134
15-24 years	30,672	30,052	16,627	5,184	13,660	24,041	384	827
25-34 "	27,875	26,633	3,701	733	23,122	23,731	1,052	2,129
35-44 "	22,032	19,528	1,150	304	19,323	15,346	1,559	3,178
45-54 "	15,719	13,898	604	173	13,076	8,314	2,038	5,412
55-64 "	9,064	8,624	299	89	6,777	3,334	1,998	5,201
65-74 "	3,867	3,976	104	37	2,533	1,092	1,230	2,847
75 and over	1,630	1,756	46	18	883	370	701	1,367
Age not stated	111	117	51	60	46	42	14	15
Total population (excluding displaced persons).	1,79,433	1,70,149	88,146	65,951	12,253	12,388	9,033	21,810

The presence of a large proportion of juveniles and a very low proportion of persons above the middle age eloquently reveal the complicated social problems which the Indian society has to face. The enormous number of child marriages and the equally significant numerous character of child widows bring into the forefront the decisive need and the resultant herculean task of overhauling the Indian society.

## LAND OF RELIGIONS

India is a land of numerous religions. It is inhabited by people belonging to almost all major religious and derivative



religious cults providing rich complexity of other-worldly beliefs, rituals, sacrifices and institutional diversity. Even the Hindu Religion, which is followed by the vast bulk of people reveals great regional variations as well as religio-ideological diversity. Table II indicates the composition of the population as distributed according to various religious beliefs.

TABLE II

## POPULATION ACCORDING TO RELIGION

Religion	Number (in lakhs)	Percentage to total population
Hindu	3,032	85.00
Muslim	354	9.92
Christian	82	2.30
Sikh	62	1.74
Jain	16	0.45
Buddhist	2	0.06
Zoroastrian	1	0.03
Other religions (tribal)	17	0.47
Other religions (non-tribal)	1	0.03
All religions	3,561	100.00

## INDIA'S MULTI-LINGUAL POPULATION

India presents a spectacle of a museum of tongues. According to the 1951 Census Report, there are 845 languages or dialects in the country. These include 720 Indian languages, each spoken by less than a hundred thousand persons and 63 non-Indian languages. However, it should be noted that 91 per cent of the total population, i.e., about 32.4 crores of people speak one or the other of the fourteen languages specified in the Constitution. Table III indicates the percentage of population speaking these fourteen languages :—

TABLE III

POPULATION ACCORDING TO LANGUAGE

Language					Number of persons (in lakhs)	Percentage to total
Hindi	}	..	..	..	1,499	46.3
Hindustani						
Urdu						
Punjabi						
Telugu	..	..	..	..	330	10.2
Marathi	..	..	..	..	270	8.3
Tamil	..	..	..	..	265	8.2
Bengali	..	..	..	..	251	7.8
Gujarati	..	..	..	..	163	5.1
Kannada	..	..	..	..	145	4.5
Malayalam	..	..	..	..	134	4.1
Oriya	..	..	..	..	132	4.0
Assamese	..	..	..	..	50	1.5
Kashmiri	..	..	..	..	0.05	
Sanskrit	..	..	..	..	0.01	

## LINGUISTIC CONFLICTS

These fourteen languages have a long historic past. They have reached a high stage of development. Rich literatures expressing the dreams, the aspirations, the emotions and the thoughts of various peoples speaking these tongues have come into being. They are further considerably localised in specific territorial zones thereby transforming various Indian Linguistic groups into separate nationalities within the Indian Nation. Some of these languages like Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam are associated with a body of traditions which have a predominantly Dravidian cultural background, differing in some respects qualitatively from the Indo-Aryan Group of languages. The difficulties involved in evolving a national language for the Indian Union can be appreciated only if this background is kept in mind. The great ferment, which has exploded into veritable tempests in contemporary India on the issue of the Reorganisation of States within the Indian Union, the objective of which has been to evolve administrative units composed of linguistic groups occupying specific territorial segments of India could be understood only if, as a preliminary step, this Linguistic com-



position of the Indian population is properly kept in mind. "About 1.2 crores of persons (3.2%) speak one or the other of the 23 tribal languages and nearly 1.8 crore persons (5.0 per cent) speak one or the other of the other Indian languages (or dialects) spoken by a lakh or more persons." The problem of providing scripts to these tongues, and the further issues involved in the supply of appropriate material and technical resources to help their development have to be intensely thought over in the general background of the poverty and scarce resources available to the society.

### DARK CLOUD—ILLITERACY

According to the Census Report of 1951, 16.6% of the people were literate. The significance of the enormity of the situation where 83.4% of the citizens lacking the elementary instrument of culture needs no elaborate discussion. It means great reliance on vocal medium for the bulk of the people. It means enormous influence of that category of the means of spread of culture, which we call oral propaganda. It means the rise and disproportionate influence of those groups of leaders who wield great demagogic powers. It also indicates the significance of spoken languages and dialects for assimilating and shaping the cultural heritage by the bulk of the population. The problem of the proper medium of instruction and communication at different stages of the educational ladder takes on a new complexion in the multi-tongued population when it is visualised that a beginning has to be made for 83% of the population. It also raises the unpleasant problem of the cost of education and its proper apportioning at various stages of education and among various tongues. The problem of priorities with regard to the sharing of the limited resources acquires acute complexity in the light of the above situation.

The specific policy of spreading literacy in India will determine which castes, which lingual groups, which social strata of the society will gain initial advantages. Will the groups so privileged utilise these advantages for their own sectional interests or for the benefits of all? How will they influence the

quality and the nature of education? The problem of illiteracy linguistic group, socio-economic stratification and the motives of the mode of life are highly inter-connected. Their implications are great in terms of the trend of social development.

### CASTE HIERARCHY

The institution of caste which emerged in India many centuries ago, which has a hoary history and has survived numerous political upheavals and military convulsions and which has been still persisting, though slowly losing vitality, due to the pressure of the forces of modern, social, economic and political developments is a unique institution unparalleled in the history of mankind. The considerable role which this institution still plays in influencing the life of the Hindus, by far the largest section of the Indian people, makes it obligatory for an investigator of the life processes of the Indian society to carry on an intimate study of this institution in all its protean functioning. Caste decides to a great extent the social status and the vocation of a member of the Hindu community, which is hierarchically graded into numerous castes and sub-castes. It largely determines the opportunities accessible to him for material and cultural self-advancement. A Hindu is a prisoner of the caste or sub-caste to which he is shackled with all its traditional handicaps, and taboos. The life of a Hindu is essentially and considerably lived within the matrix of the particular caste or sub-caste to which he is affiliated. This largely moulds his consciousness keeping it at a petty level.

Further caste differences also engender different patterns of domestic and social life, different cultural complexes, even differences in the type of houses which various caste groups inhabit. Not only that. Due to historical reasons, property rights exist, markedly in agrarian area, on caste lines as also administrative functions and occupations. It must also be noted that the massive and complicated inherited religious and secular culture of the Hindu community which still holds almost decisive sway over their mind is caste contoured. It has fixed the psychology of the various social groups and has evolved such

minutely graded levels of social distance and superior-inferior relationships that the social structure looks like a gigantic hierarchic pyramid with a mass of untouchable as its base and a small stratum of elite, the Brahmins, almost unapproachable, at its apex. The Hindu society is composed of hundreds of distinct self-contained caste worlds piled one over the other.

#### CLASSIFICATION OF CASTES DURING BRITISH RULE

During the British period, these castes were broadly grouped into four categories, viz., the higher castes, the intermediate castes, the backward castes and the scheduled castes. After Independence, the Constitution of India has abolished all caste distinctions. However, this *de jure* abolition does not mean *de facto* abolition of the caste system in real life. The caste matrix of the Indian population has been deliberately omitted in the Census of 1951, except for some special groups. This has drawn a curtain over the most vital aspect of the Indian social life. Instead of utilising the census data for properly correlating the factor of caste with property ownership, wealth and linguistic, educational as well as other factors of vital social concern, by eliminating the caste factor from the census study, the framers of the census have veiled the operation of a decisively important force which operates very subtly in retarding the growth of democratic social relations between the citizens of the Indian Union. Even more than that, this ostrich-like ignoring of the caste has prevented the proper understanding of those forces which are evolving various devices to perpetuate a hierarchic and unjust social order.

#### CASTE MONOPOLY OF POWER

It has been observed by a number of students of the social life of the Indian people that there is a close correlation between the position of caste in the hierarchy of the Hindu social order and the respective status of its member with regard to wealth, economic rank, class position, political power and accessibility to education and culture. It has been pointed out by some outstanding students of the Hindu society that a couple of dozens

of castes in India hold the monopoly of economic resources, political power, and educational and cultural facilities available. As has been indicated by a number of studies, an overwhelming majority of agrarian labourers or unprivileged classes of the Indian society spring from untouchables, some of the backward castes and the uprooted scheduled tribes.

#### CASTE AND DEMOCRACY

This point has to be properly borne in mind for a number of reasons. It alone gives clue to the live processes, both of contacts and conflicts, which provide dynamics to the Indian social life. It helps us to understand a number of movements that erupt in different parts of the country such as the Anti-Brahmin movement in South, the Anti-Bhatji and Sethji (Anti-Brahminic and Anti-Businessmen) movements in Maharashtra. It also helps us to gain an insight into numerous linguistic, communal and class conflicts wherein the co-mingling of certain castes with certain exploiting classes symbolically representing certain communal or linguistic groups operate as an under-current in these movements. It also raises a significant problem. Will it be possible to abolish caste system and caste hierarchy in fact without adopting measures of basic changes in the economic structure? Could cultural and other forces be released such as would create economic security and extend cultural facilities to the lowest strata, and abolish the caste system and caste hierarchy in reality?

#### EMERGING SMALL FAMILY PATTERN

Village self-sufficient community, caste system and joint family were the three pivotal social institutions on which the Hindu social structure was reared. A general feeling about the family system prevailing in India is that it is still largely joint based on the joint living of members belonging to three generations. However, the findings of the Report of the Census of 1951 reveal a different reality.

The census differentiates 4 types of households: one having three members or less as a 'small' household; one which has

4, 5 or 6 members as a 'medium' household; one which has 7, 8 or 9 members as a large household; and one which has 10 or more members as a 'very large household'. Table IV indicates how many households of each type are found in a typical village and a typical town.

TABLE IV  
PATTERN OF HOUSEHOLD

Type of household	No. of households in a	
	Typical Village	Typical Town
Small .. .. .	33	38
Medium .. .. .	44	41
Large .. .. .	17	16
Very Large .. .. .	6	5
Total ..	100	100

The fact that nearly 77% of the households in village constitute small and medium households and further that every third household in the village constitutes a family having three or less than three persons clearly discloses the fact that the traditional joint family of the Hindu society is rapidly experiencing disintegration. The habit of breaking away from the joint family and setting up small families has been growing. Though some sociologists have doubted the sharp formulation of the Census Authorities, it is admitted by all that the traditional joint family is disintegrating and is creating varied types of family structures which have lost their old vitality and functions and which have still not crystallized themselves into healthy nuclear family types.

#### DISINTEGRATION OF THE JOINT FAMILY—ITS IMPLICATIONS

The traditional joint family was a universe in itself, performing all the important economic, political, social, religious, recreational and cultural functions in the old society. The joint family has broken down. However, in India, the functions



which should have been taken over by the other specialised associations and groups are not shouldered by these bodies either effectively or in a sufficient measure thereby hurling the individual into a new whirlpool of social and cultural competitive ferment unprotected. The policies of the present government are also so moulded that they generate the forces which would accelerate this process of disintegration of joint family. What are the implications of this process in terms of economic security, political stability, social solidarity and cooperative endeavours, cultural designs and personality and character integrity? How far the Indian society which has lost its old stability and design will create a new equilibrium of various institutions and associations? What measures will really generate a new progressive and higher harmony of inter-personal relations?

These are some of the problems which emerge from the analysis of the family composition of the Indian population as it exists today.

#### CLASS STRATIFICATION OF INDIAN SOCIETY

As observed earlier, India is overwhelmingly rural. It is a poor underdeveloped country with a national income of Rs. 9,950 crores in 1953-54, and a *per capita* income in the same year of Rs. 266.5 both computed at 1948-49 price level.

Under the impact of the British rule and its economic policies, India has been transformed from a feudal to a capitalist country. The Indian society is now stratified into new classes like capitalist (commercial, industrial and financial), professional classes like lawyers, doctors and others, fairly large-sized middle class employees and an overwhelming section of the urban proletariat living on wages in urban areas. While in rural areas we find the society regrouped into classes of agrarian landlords, peasant proprietors, tenants and agricultural labourers along with strata of ruined artisans and a group of money-lenders and traders. It is unfortunate that a proper analysis of the distribution of wealth among various classes has not been tabulated either in the Census Report of 1951 or in the Indian Year Books.



## RURAL CLASS STRUCTURE

We will briefly portray the class composition as it prevails in agrarian area. We will also indicate the concentration of land that has taken place there. It will reveal how the agrarian India which was founded on a balanced self-sufficient village economy on the basis of equilibrium of agriculture and artisan industry and functioning through village panchayat, caste councils and joint family and producing for subsistence before the advent of the British rule has undergone a qualitative transformation. The following statements unfold this class configuration that has taken place in agrarian areas.

The available cultivable land *per capita* is only 0.9 acres. It indicates the enormous pressure of population on land. About 75 per cent of the total sown area is under food crops. "The gross value of these crops is only almost equal to that of cash crops though the latter are sown on merely 25 per cent of the land. About 35% of the total produce is sold by the cultivators. In nearly two-thirds of these sales transactions the commodity is delivered to the trader in the village itself". "The marketing of agricultural produce is largely in the hands of a body of men, who, as distinguished from Government and Co-operatives, represent private interests, and who control both the sources of credit and disposal of the produce. Often enough, therefore, the cultivators' position is that of having to bargain, if he can, with someone who commands the money, commands the credit ; commands the market and comes with transport". This point is emphasized to highlight the immense power of the new class of creditors and traders in an underdeveloped rural economy which is switching on from production for subsistence to that of market. In the peculiar environment based on the hierarchic caste system, the combination of superior caste prestige and this economic hold needs to be properly understood.

The following is the picture of the rural class structure as it has emerged after the British withdrawal :—

Agricultural landowners	..	22.2 per cent.
Agricultural tenants	..	27.2     ,,
Agricultural labourers	..	30.4     ,,
Non-agriculturists	..	20.2     ,,

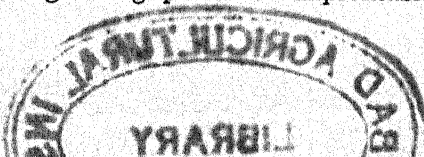
The inequality of the cultivators' holdings is also considerable. "Holdings below one acre formed about 17 per cent ; those between 1 and 2½ acres about 21 per cent ; and those between 2½ acres to 5 acres another 21 per cent. These accounted respectively for 1.0, 4.5 and 9.9 per cent of the total area. At the other end of the scale 16 per cent were in the group 10 to 25 acres accounting for 32.5 per cent of the area and another 5.6 per cent above 25 acres covering about 34 per cent of the area and further. The medium cultivator, numerically two-fifths of the cultivators, has less than a third of the sown area under him. There is an even steeper descent when we come to the small cultivators, his sown area is just a little more than a tenth of the total area sown by the cultivators."

#### THE UNPRIVILEGED IN THE INDIAN SOCIETY

The rise of the agrarian proletariat, the existence of a large section of uneconomic holders of land, and the prevalence of an enormous group of ruined artisans who constitute the bulk of the non-agricultural section of the rural population reveal the tragic tale of the miserable economic life lived by the large section of rural population in the Indian Union.

Viewed from the standard of economic stratification, India contains the following categories of people whose problems are becoming explosively urgent :—

- (1) Vast groups of Scheduled Tribes who are almost living the life of agrarian serfs or debt slaves.
- (2) Agricultural labourers whose grim tale of existence is portrayed in the studies conducted by agricultural Labour Enquiry Committee.
- (3) The cultivators of uneconomic holdings gripped in the evertightening pincer of unprofitable deficit produc-



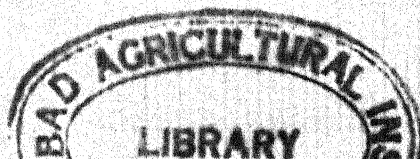
tion, taxation, claims of the moneylender and market fluctuations.

- (4) A large majority of artisans and craftsmen who are progressively being ruined due to the blows of competitive market economy.
- (5) The bulk of the petty producers who just produce enough in normal times to make both ends meet.
- (6) The bulk of rural unemployed or under-employed whose position and horrible helpless mode of existence is indescribable.
- (7) In urban areas, the unemployed, the wage labourer, the bulk of middle class employees, handicraftsmen and petty shopkeepers and traders constitute the bulk of the population who form the economically underprivileged groups living a precarious, insecure existence. Along with these sections it would be proper to mention the group of displaced refugees, by far the largest section of whom are, still living a very unstable and economically precarious life.

#### WEALTH CONCENTRATION IN INDIA

India is thus not merely poor and underdeveloped but is having a class stratification wherein a few capitalists (financial, industrial and commercial), a few moneylenders and traders (many a time fused with either urban capitalist groups or with land-owning sections in the rural India), a small section of the upper stratum of the professional groups, a layer of big landlords, prosperous capitalist agricultural farmers and the top stratum of the peasant proprietors, have concentrated wealth and economic resources among themselves.

This peculiar class configuration is very subtly correlated with the groups with specific linguistic, caste and educational stratifications, making the problem of economic, social and cultural progress of the Indian people as a whole complex and difficult.



## PROBLEMS BEFORE INDEPENDENT INDIA

What should be the nature of economic planning in India ? What should be the nature of the institutional devices which would assist the transformation of the present population into economically secure, politically equal, socially non-hierarchic and culturally equipped with values which are embodied in the aspirations laid down in the Preamble to the Constitution ? What will be the nature of levers for accomplishing such a transformation of the Indian Society ?

These and a number of other issues emerge when we make even a cursory sociological analysis of India.

## *Sociological Problems of Economic Development*

The object of this essay is to indicate, in a very brief manner, the Sociological problems involved in the process of economic development that has been launched by the government of the Indian Union.

### MEANING OF SOCIOLOGICAL PROBLEMS

By Sociological problems, we mean here, the problems of replacing the old social organization, modifying or discarding old social institutions, altering or removing old forms of social controls and revising or liquidating old agencies of social change, with a view to overcoming their retarding role in the economic development of the Indian people. Further, we also mean, by this, the problems connected with the evolving new web of social relations, new types of social institutions, new devices of social control and also new agencies and factors of social change which would be appropriate for a rapid and harmonious development of the economic life of the Indian people.

Like a number of Colonial and Semi-Colonial Countries which were under the domination of various Imperialist Powers, India was also kept underdeveloped by British Imperialism. It was kept predominantly as an agrarian, raw material producing appendage of British Imperialism. Its industrial development was predominantly regulated to suit the needs of British Capitalism. Heavy industries were not permitted to grow. Even regarding light industries, only those were allowed to develop which either did not compete seriously with similar home industries or which provided better and more profitable opportunities

for the investment of British Capital. In fact the British and other foreign capital dominated Indian industries during the British period. Indian economic development was carried on under the dictatorship of British Imperialism.

This, as is well-known, led to a lop-sided unsymmetrical dependent and weak development of the country. The British rulers thus weakened the old motif, the old technique and the old organization of production but did not replace them by healthy new ones to any extensive degree. They introduced the Capitalist mode of production in India but only to the extent that subserved the interests of the British economy and not sufficiently enough to organically weld the entire mechanism of production of the country within the Capitalist economic framework. They introduced mechanization in production which proved just effective enough to dislocate the old pre-British economy for their own purpose but not sufficiently extensive as to make it the basis of the entire national economy. They initiated Commercialization of production and money economy in the Country but only to the extent that would subserve their exploitative interest and not the organic developmental economic needs of the Indian society. Thus, under the British rule, a hybrid national economy developed in India composed of two inharmoniously interconnected sectors, viz., a sector organized for market and an inherited sector which predominantly survived and functioned for subsistence.

While the British rulers thus distorted and retarded the free harmonious development of the Indian economy, they also made a peculiar dent into the social organization, social institutions and social outlooks of the Indian people.

The traditional self-sufficient village community, which was based on equilibrium of agriculture and artisan industry, which operated through the village panchayat, caste and joint family institutions and was governed by custom and which subscribed to other-worldly, fatalistic, stationary outlooks, was almost fatally undermined. However, it was not replaced by a new social framework, a new institutional matrix, a new outlook corresponding to and in harmony with the new type of economy. In fact, in absence of these, the introduction of the new legal



system resulted only in disorganizing the then prevailing social relations and introducing chaos in these. The old principle of co-ordination and co-operation (though based on hierarchy, inequality and authority) on which the pre-British community was based, was replaced by the principle of competition which set into motion a whirlpool in the social structure. Further, the restricted insufficient and deformed development of the new economy prevented the full blossoming of a new form of social unity and solidarity (national in character) and a new modern outlook. Every development in the material, social and ideological domain, exhibited mainly two characteristics, hybridness and underdevelopment.

Such was the economic and social legacy of the British rule left to the Indian people at the time of the achievement of national independence.

#### SOCIAL PROBLEMS OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The Government of the sovereign and free Indian Union has earnestly set to itself the herculean task of the reconstruction of the economy of India. Its policy of economic development is slowly taking shape through its Five Year plans.

We shall divide the sociological problems confronting the Indian Government for a successful implementing of its schemes of economic development into two categories.

#### PROBLEMS OF NEGATIVE CHARACTER

The first category of problems are of a negative character. They arise out of various types of social legacies which work as an obstacle to the progressive achievement of the economic developmental programme. They are due to the immense dead-weight of social, institutional and ideological superstructure which may have corresponded to the past, authoritarian, and traditional society based chiefly on the subsistence economy but which still persists and works as a shackle on the developing new economy. This group of problems arise out of the persistence of old social institutions like caste, authoritarian joint

family, tribes, traditional religious institutions, serfdom and others. They also emerge out of old forms of social control like supernatural sanctions, authoritarian norms, complicated and intricate caste, family tribal, religious and other customary sanctions permeating almost every pore of the life of the Indian humanity. They also arise out of the old world outlook which was basically religious, other-worldly, fatalistic and anti-democratic in content. They spring also from the strong parochial inter-personal ties leading to sectional, petty-tribal, kin, caste, family, religious or regional loyalties detrimental to national and broad human emotions. They further emanate from large-scale ill-health, unemployment or weightage of employment in favour of certain castes or certain regional groups.

#### PROBLEMS OF POSITIVE CHARACTER

The second category of the Sociological problems arise from the very nature of the economic development which has been inaugurated by the Indian government.

They arise out of the policy of industrialization, of commercialization, of the introduction of money economy in every corner of the country. They arise out of its agrarian policy and from the very character of the economic order which it wishes to establish. The government has become the biggest single agency of economic development. It thereby generates currents of social processes which are of unique significance as we shall observe subsequently.

#### SOCIAL OBSTACLES TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

We shall now survey the Sociological problems in relation to the economic development in greater detail to have a clearer view of them.

In an interesting report published by the United Nations Organization dealing with "Processes and Problems of Industrialization in Underdeveloped Countries" it has been pointed out that among the three basic obstacles to economic development in underdeveloped countries, the social and institutional frame-

work and values inherited from the past constitute an important obstacle.

### CASTE SYSTEM—AN ILLUSTRATION

The Caste System in India provides one of the best examples of this. The retarding role and the reactionary significance of this institution is still very insufficiently realized by the students of India's economic development.

Though this institution was affected during the British rule, and though it has been abolished theoretically and juridically by the Constitution of Free India, its significance in real life, its influence on the economic development, its direct effect upon the patterns of property relations and patterns of consumption, and its impress upon the configurations of power structure in the economic, political, social and cultural fields is still not properly comprehended and hence gravely under-estimated.

Caste prevents mobility of the people so essential for dynamic economic development. It prevents certain groups from taking to certain vocations, certain patterns of economic behaviour, certain forms of consumption. It obstructs the growth of a socially mobile population which would be conducive to easy and quick manning of various vocations.

One of the interesting findings by some of the scholars of Indian society is that most of the controlling positions in economy, administration, and cultural pursuits are monopolized by a few castes all over India. Not merely that. Some of the castes of a few regions today even control the destiny of the entire people of the country, leading to a number of caste, economic, and regional tensions.

This monopoly of certain castes and groups of certain linguistic zones has generated a peculiar unrest in the modern competitive social setting. It engenders and keeps alive a bitter competitive struggle among the privileged groups themselves as well as between them and the unprivileged groups also. This struggle exercises a highly detrimental effect on the development of a healthy national economy.

A closed study of a number of tensions which have emerged and which are rampant in India, when properly investigated, reveals, as one of the important causes, the caste background.

#### PERSISTENCE OF BACKWARD TYPES OF LOYALTIES

Another sociological implication of the legacy of the caste and other pre-industrial social institutions is the persistence of backward types of loyalties resulting into factionalism and division of the Indian people into groups with petty caste and other group egos to the detriment of the growth of a highly developed national consciousness.

As pointed out by the UNO Report on 'Processes and Problems of Industrialization in Underdeveloped countries', "Another characteristic of pre-industrial society found in all its subdivisions and at all levels, is factionalism, that is the tendency of the society to be divided by caste and class cleavages, ethnic and religious distinctions, differences in cultural traditions and social pattern, kinship loyalties and regional identifications, and so on. These divisions tend to inhibit the development of a feeling of unity in the society and of identity among its members and as a result the individual's sense of personal loyalty and duty may be limited to the members of a very narrow social environment; his family, his clan, local community, or parochial circles groupings. The normative pressure rooted in such an environment may profoundly affect the conduct of the individual in external situations and relations. In particular they may pose difficult problems for personnel recruitment and management".

This parochial mentality together with the old outmoded institutions in an underdeveloped country, obstructs the proper economic development in a number of ways.

(1) First, it leads to the practice of nepotism. Not efficiency and merit but ingroup loyalty often becomes the basis of the selection of personnel. It leads to favouritism, corruption, monopolization, all those practices which militate against healthy economic progress of the nation.

(2) It also results in the growth of the harmful practices of wrong (unproductive) investment patterns and wrong consumption patterns. Such fields of activity as speculation, hoarding, moneylending, land-owning and trading attract capital with far greater temptation than industrial enterprises. A considerable amount of wealth is also squandered in conspicuous consumption. Traditional outlooks, social mores and institutional compulsions on the background of the scarce resources are largely responsible for this. The herculean but relatively ineffective efforts made by the Government of the Indian Union to plough back these resources from those unhealthy economic activities and to divert them in proper industrial channels bear eloquent testimony to the pernicious impact of old social institutions and old outlooks on the healthy economic development of the Indian society.

(3) It also generates distorted attitudes to work, to the problem of efficiency, to the selection of vocations, also to the allocation of resources and patterns of production and consumption. It further prevents the rapid growth of those secular, positive, scientific, and technologically oriented approaches which are so vital for the expansion and development of an economic system.

(4) It also obstructs the growth of those mores and sanctions which are basic to a developing economy in modern times, viz., mores and sanctions founded on law, respect for personality, concept of equal citizenship and also based on contract.

There are a number of other sociological problems of this group which relate to economic development. Limitation of space, however, precludes discussion on these.

#### ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIOLOGICAL PROBLEM

We will now briefly survey the sociological problems which arise as a result of the positive implementation of the policy of economic development which has been launched by the Government of the Indian Union.



It is unfortunate that while a number of evaluation and progress reports of the economic measures adopted by the Government of the Indian Union have been published, no serious attempt has still been made to evaluate the sociological implications of these measures.

We shall hazard our views on this on the basis of some findings of a few scholars as well as on that of the findings of some international associations which have studied the sociological problems involved in the efforts to transform underdeveloped countries into prosperous ones. UNESCO publications in the Tensions and Technology series indicate a number of sociological problems of economic development. We will mention a few typical instances.

Industrialization, mechanization, commercialization and spread of money economy are the fourfold devices by means of which economic development is attempted to be worked up.

#### INDUSTRIALISATION, MECHANISATION AND THEIR SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES

It has been found that industrialisation uproots the old division of labour, creates new occupational patterns demanding new training, new discipline, new routine, and a new mode of living. It has been found that "in introducing a programme of industrialization or building of great public works and large factories, such countries have introduced radical change in the standards of living, drastically curtailing consumers' goods. Usually the effects have been much more far-reaching and costly in human welfare than this statement implies".

Further, "Mechanisation itself, whether in agriculture or in industry, separates man from the traditional processes and techniques of his social units, from the skills which he learned as an aspect of his belongingness with his family or of his identification with his father or line of ancestors. Finally, even on small farm, where even cash crops have been introduced, the effect of the new money economy have often been of the same kind as with the introduction of industrial wages".



## COMMERCIALIZATION AND ITS SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE

Commercialization also creates numerous problems. It brings about a shift in power and authority in the village. Not the farmers and producers but owners, creditors and administrators are becoming the ruling groups. The centre of political power of the village shifts from elders and the old gentry to usurers, merchants, landlords, prosperous capitalist farmers, and the group of officials. As pointed out by a UNESCO report, "Commercialization unaccompanied by healthy system of production is thus shown to be a deteriorating factor..... although it at first brings a transitory period of prosperity."

## IMPLICATION OF MONETIZATION IN AGRICULTURE

Similarly, spread of money economy is also fraught with numerous sociological problems. As Mr. Sengupta has pointed out, "it has been shown that higher monetization of different sectors absolutely and relatively creates several dangers of which the authority should be aware. These dangers are: (i) greater susceptibility to internal and external propagation of cyclical ups and downs with relative deterioration of the agriculturist, (ii) greater money illusion and hence more uneven distribution of burdens of fluctuating prices, (iii) greater proportion of expenditure on non-food item, and non-necessities, (iv) greater fluctuation in land values, (v) greater price-spreads of food articles, (vi) lower percentage of village retention and (vii) greater propensity to stock for mediate links in the economy and uneven land concentration. Monetary and fiscal policy in future must take account of the implied threat of putting more money into the economy, some spilling out to villages". And further as observed by a scholar, "The introduction of money economy has usually meant atomization of the individuals within family, complete destruction of the structuring of family relationships, and of the social and economic system of the group.....the money economy has meant secession and revolt, the undermining of parental authority and the authority of the tradition and this has resulted in the rise of the 'young generation' as a class apart.

Marriage is often no longer a contract between families but... one between a man and a woman".

Thus industrialization, mechanization, commercialization and introduction and development of money economy which are attempted to be extended and made universal in our country as a part of policy of economic development are generating sociological problems.

If the ultimate object of economic development is the raising of the levels of living, the provision of higher standards of nutrition, housing and health, of a larger *per capita* volume of manufactured goods and leisure, occupational and income security and greater cultural facilities, its fulfilment will demand great and drastic social changes. New property institutions will be required to be built up, new family organization will have to be evolved. Provision for cultural and social amenities, which will be a substitute for the loss of old form of mutual aid and customary co-operation shall have to be made. India is overwhelmingly rural. To transform this agrarian country into an industrial one, a vast network of new institutions, new associations, new forms of co-operative social activities, new forms of secular, equalitarian and democratic norms and mores and new techniques of overhauling the outlook of the people will have to be created. New appropriate organizations and structural patterns to compensate for the loss of old stability assured by caste and joint family shall have to be conceived and brought into being.

Thus the programme of economic development launched by the Government of the Indian Union raises numerous positive sociological problems.

#### TWO DIRECTIONS OF DEVELOPMENT

How far this Government will be able to successfully resolve the problems arising out of the needs of the healthy economic development will depend upon whether its aim of the economic development itself is to evolve a society founded on the objective of production for the profits of few, or that of production for the satisfaction of the needs of the people.

The two different objectives of economic development will engender two qualitatively different groups of sociological problems. Unfortunately, as pointed out in our other books and articles, the Government of Indian Union has chosen the first path, the path of reconstructing economy of India on the postulates of capitalist mixed economy. It is thus aggravating those social trends and forces which basically retard the healthy reconstruction of Indian social organization.

## NEW SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROBLEM

The problem of Tribal population has acquired a new significance after Independence.

What are these tribes? How do they differ from the non-tribal population? Why have they remained at a tribal stage of social evolution. How did they fare in History? What is their present status and condition? What is their future in the context of the objectives laid down in the Constitution of the Indian Union and planned economic development inaugurated by the Government of India? All these and a number of other questions have cropped up with acute poignancy during the post-Independence period.

There is another reason which has forced the problems of the tribal population to the forefront. There has taken place a great awakening among these groups. Struggles to improve their conditions have and are being launched by various groups comprising this stratum of Indian population.

The forest satyagrahas of various tribal groups in different parts of India, the revolts of Warlis, Dublas, Dhodias, Bhils and others in the Western India against their inhuman exploitation by landlords, contractors, moneylenders and petty officials, the organised protests started by Santhals and other tribal groups, the movement to secure Zarland and similar tribal autonomous belts in the Bihar, the M. P. and other States of the Indian Union, and finally, the continuous, violent, almost military battles of the Nagas of Assam, for last fifteen years either for an autonomous Naga State within the Indian Union or even

complete Independence—these and such other expressions of the awakening of the tribal people have elevated the problem of the tribal population to a new level of acuteness.

#### AGENCIES HANDLING THE PROBLEM

Numerous agencies have been attempting to study and solve the problems of the tribal population.

The Indian National Congress—as the governing party—has, from the day of framing the Constitution of the Indian Union, adopted various measures to handle the tribal problems. Special clauses have been incorporated in the Constitution for the creation of Scheduled Areas for their intensive development, by granting various tribes an autonomous status for internal administration, such as N.E.F.A. (Manipur, Tripura, North Cachar hills). Further, they are provided with special representation in the Parliament, in Legislative Assemblies, Local Bodies and special privileges in the form of reservation of a certain percentage of posts in the Government services and seats in the educational institutions. In addition, the Government have established the special office of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes for safeguarding their interests. It has also framed special welfare schemes exclusively for them with having as its objective the bringing of these tribes on par with the rest of the Indian people.

Christian Missionaries and Hindu Social Reformers have also intensified their efforts to study and reform the conditions of the tribes. Academicians,—Anthropologists, Sociologists and others—have also launched a vigorous drive to scientifically study the situation and the problems of the tribal population. Tribal research institutes have also been sponsored to methodically explore and examine the conditions and the problems of the tribal communities. Further, various political parties have been extending their zones of activities in tribal areas. They have created numerous organizations in the tribal areas and even launched various movements to redress the grievances of the tribal population. The “vocal” educated and richer sections of the tribes in various parts of the country themselves

have also started independent organizations of the tribal population, with a view to securing concessions which they feel to be beneficial to the tribes.

### TRIBAL POPULATION

India, it is claimed, has the largest tribal population compared to any other single country in the world. However, regarding the total strength of the tribal population inhabiting India, there exists a wide divergence of assessment by scholars, as well as Census Reports. As Professor Mamoria has pointed out, "Doubts have been expressed about the reliability of their numbers for two reasons. Firstly because of the difficulty of classification and, secondly, because of deliberate misrepresentations as after 1909 with the inauguration of the separate religious electorates, there had been an increasing pressure on the part of religious groups to swell their number in the census. As a result of these errors, the data on the tribals are most inaccurate of all those gathered by the Census."<sup>1</sup>

However, without entering into the fascinating history of this controversy over the assessment of the numerical strength of the tribal population, we will presume that the tribal population in India ranges between about twenty millions as assessed by the 1951 Census and twenty five millions as estimated by the Conference of Social Workers and Anthropologists held in 1948.

Out of these 25 millions, 20 millions, according to these scholars, "live in the plains and are assimilated with the rest of the people, more or less, and only 5 millions may be taken as the population residing in the hills."<sup>2</sup>

### CONTROVERSY REGARDING DESIGNATION

Another controversy which is rampant among the scholars, reformers and administrators is regarding adequate designation to describe these groups.

Risely, Lacey, Elwin, Grigson, Shoobert, Tallents, Sedwick, Martin, A. V. Thakkar and others have described them as "aborigines" or 'aboriginals'. Hutton called them as primitive



tribes. Dr. Ghurye described them as 'so-called aborigines' or 'Backward Hindus' and now accepts the designation 'Scheduled Tribes' as formulated in the Constitution of the Indian Union. Some scholars and reformers have described them as Adivasis. Dr. Das and others designated them as "submerged humanity".

It would be very interesting and thought-provoking to probe into the reasons which prompted various scholars, administrators and reformers to adopt different designations to describe the same group. It would open up a new line of inquiry, an inquiry into the different ideologies of those scholars and administrators who were prompted to evolve different designations. However, lack of space forbids this discussion.

The Constitution of the Indian Union (Article 366) has defined "Scheduled Tribes" as "such tribes or tribal communities or parts of or groups within such tribes or tribal communities as are deemed under Article 342 to be Scheduled Tribes for the purpose of this Constitution." Constitution Order 1950 declared 212 tribes located in 14 States as "Scheduled Tribes".

#### CONTRADICTIONARY CRITERIA

It is pertinent to point out that no single criterion has been hitherto adopted to distinguish tribal from non-tribal population. Different and even contradictory criteria have been employed by anthropologists, social reformers, Government officials, Census Commissioners and others for this purpose. Dr. Ghurye in his work *The Scheduled Tribes* has pointed out how factors like religion or occupation or racial features have proved inadequate to distinguish the tribal people from the non-tribal population in India.

However, the purest of the tribal groups, which have been still resisting acculturation or absorption, possess certain feature which can be considered as common features once possessed by all the tribal groups. They are as follows :

(1) They live away from the civilized world in the inaccessible parts lying in the forests and hills ; (2) They belong either to one of the three stocks—Nagritos, Austroloids, or Mongoloids ; (3) They speak the same tribal dialect ; (4) They

profess primitive religion known as "Animism" in which the worship of Ghosts and Spirits is the most important element ; (5) They follow primitive, occupations such as gleaning, hunting, and gathering of forest produce ; (6) They are largely carnivorous or flesh or meat eaters ; (7) They live either naked or semi-naked using tree barks and leaves for clothing ; (8) They have nomadic habits and love for drink and dance."<sup>3</sup>

However, out of 25 million described as the tribal people, only 5 millions possess these features.

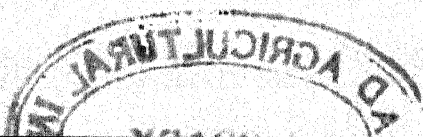
### TRIBES IN VARIOUS STAGES

The tribal population in India belongs to various stages of cultural development. Dr. Elwin divides Tribes into four classes according to their stage of cultural development. Class I is the purest of the pure tribal groups comprising about two or three million persons. Dr. Elwin and a large section of missionary reformers and anthropologists grow lyrical over the robust, vibrant and healthy life of these tribal groups. Dr. Elwin's panegyric is worth quoting : "These Highlanders do not merely exist like so many villagers, they really *live*. Their religion is characteristic and alive ; their tribal organisation is unimpaired, their artistic and choreographic traditions are unbroken ; their mythology still vitalizes the healthy organisation of tribal life. Geographical conditions have largely protected them from the debasing contacts of the plains. It has been said that the hoot of the motor-horn would sound the knell-of the aboriginal tribes."<sup>4</sup>

### CONTRASTING CHARACTERISTICS

However, a section of this category of tribes has been experiencing "contact with the plains" and consequently has been undergoing change. This group, Class II of Dr. Elwin's classification, though retaining their tribal mode of living has been exhibiting the following characteristics in contrast to the first group :

(a) Instead of communal life, this group lives a village life which has become individualistic. Their communal life and



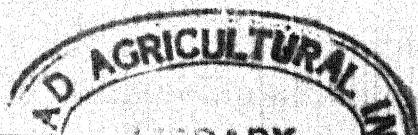
traditions, are only preserved through their village dormitories ; (b) In contrast to the Class I Tribes, the members of those of Class II do not share things with one another ; (c) Axe cultivation has ceased to be a way of life for them ; (d) The members of these tribes are more contaminated by the outside life. They come in contact with the groups living in the periphery, which live a more complex viz., civilized life ; (e) The members of these tribes (Class II) according to Dr. Elwin, are less simple and less honest than the members of the tribes belonging to class I.<sup>5</sup>

### THE AGONIES OF MAJORITY OF TRIBALS

The tribes belonging to Class III constitute the largest section of the total tribal population about four-fifth of it, i.e., nearly twenty millions. Members of this class of tribal groups are in a peculiar state of transition. According to some investigators, they are tribals in name but have become "backward Hindus" constituting a sizeable section of the lower rung of the Hindu Society or some further constituting Christians. They have been appreciably affected by external contacts. They have been exposed to the influences of economic and socio-cultural forces of the Hindu Society. They have been also subjected to missionary influences. But, above all, they have been most adversely affected by the British economic and political policies which resulted in dragging them into the orbit of colonial-capitalist system in India.

The members belonging to this category of tribal groups were uprooted from their tribal mode of production in the same way as millions of cultivators and artisans living in the multitude of autarchic villages of pre-British India from their self-sufficient, self-conducted village, community setting. During the British period, under the impact of new economic and new politico-administrative measures, these tribesmen lost their moorings from their tribal economy, tribal social organisation, tribal religion and tribal cultural life.

A large section of this population was reduced to the status of bond slaves or agrestic serfs of moneylenders, zamindars and



contractors who emerged in Indian society as a result of the political and economic policies pursued by the British. Another section was reduced to the category of near slave labourers working on plantations, in mines, railway and road, constructions and other enterprises. They were uprooted from habitat and have been living a wretched existence. A section of these tribes were branded as criminal tribes, as the members of these tribes could survive by methods officially described as crimes because of loss of land, occupation and no accessibility to alternate occupation, as a result of the economic and political measures adopted by the British Rulers to enhance their colonial economic exploitation.

#### LIKE NON-TRIBALS

The vast bulk of the lower strata of the Indian Society—Hindu, Muslim, Christian and Buddhist—from the exploited sections of the Indian Society suffer from the same disabilities which the tribals suffer. They have been uprooted from their moorings in the same way as artisans and peasants were uprooted under the impact of colonial-capitalist profit-oriented economic and political forces. They have been subjected to the same groups of the new exploiting sections which emerged as a result of the new colonial-capitalist economic framework and subjected to the same difficulties as other groups by losing their old customary mode of living and loss of their own ancient organization like tribal councils, as other groups lost their own caste councils. They suffer from the rigours of law which were favourable to propertied classes in the same way as people belonging to lower castes in the most non-tribal population. It is one of the ironies of distorted perspective that a large number of scholars, Missionaries, social reformers and administrators have not been able to visualise the major basic common problems confronted by all the exploited strata belonging either to tribal or non-tribal groups, and are not able to locate the common origin of these common problems in the socio-economic system which ushered in India after the advent of British Rule.

## WINNING THE BATTLE

The Class IV of tribals (a very small minority) consists of "the old aristocracy of the country, represented to-day by great Bhil and Naga Chieftains, the Gond Rajas, a few Binghawar and Bhuyia landlords, Korku noblemen, wealthy Santhal and Uraon leaders and some highly cultured Mundas. They retain the old Tribal names and their clan and totem rules and observe elements of tribal religion though generally adopt the full Hindu faith and live in modern and even European style."<sup>6</sup>

According to Dr. Elwin, this class of tribals have won the battle of culture contacts. It means that they have acquired "aristocratic traditions, economic stability, affluence, outside encouragement, a certain arrogance and self-confidence characteristic alike of ancient families and modern enterprise."<sup>7</sup> This class of tribals have secured, according to Dr. Elwin, the benefits of civilization, without injury to themselves.

Further, Dr. Elwin observes : "The whole aboriginal problem is how to enable the tribesmen of the first and second classes to advance direct into the fourth class without having to suffer the despair and degradation of the third."<sup>8</sup>

## RECENT CLASSIFICATIONS

Anthropologists and workers who met, as the Tribal Welfare Committee, under the auspices of the Indian Conference of Social Welfare Work at Calcutta recently, suggested the following classification of the existing tribes :

- "(1) Tribal communities or those who are still confined to the original forest habitats and follow the old pattern of life ;
- (2) Semi-Tribal Communities or those who have more or less settled down in rural areas and have taken to agriculture and allied occupations ;
- (3) Accultured Tribal communities or those who have migrated to urban or semi-urban areas and are engaged in modern industries and vocations and have adopted modern cultural traits ; and



(4) Totally Assimilated Tribals in the Indian population."<sup>9</sup>

Dr. Ghurye in his book *The Scheduled Tribes*, in Chapter II "Assimilational Stresses and Strains" has divided the Tribes into three classes : "The so-called aboriginal tribes may be divided into three classes : First, such sections of them as the Raj Gonds and others who have successfully fought the battle, and are recognised as members of fairly high status within Hindu Society ; second, the large mass that has been partially Hinduized and has come in closer contact with Hindus ; and third, the hill sections, which have exhibited the greatest power of resistance to the alien cultures that have pressed upon their border,"<sup>10</sup>

#### REASONS FOR EMPHASISING CLASSIFICATION

Even at the cost of incurring the odium of disproportionate delineation of these varied classifications of Tribes, it is absolutely essential to emphasise this point for the following reasons:

(1) The problems of the tribal population belonging to various categories are qualitatively different and demand different solutions. Are the pristine primitives living in the forest areas, who constitute nearly two million persons, to be kept in their hilly and forest isolation amidst their semi-starving, semi-clothed, food-gathering or axe cultivating stage ? Is it objectively possible to keep them isolated, even if desired, in the epoch of railways, motors, electricity, radio, telephone and even aeroplanes ? "If the hoot of the motor horn is sounding the death-knell of tribal existence", can this hoot be prevented ?

#### INEVITABLE ABSORPTION

Almost every one now accepts that such a possibility is not merely utopian but even unreal moon-shine. Every corner of the land including hills and forests is being enmeshed into the web of more complex civilized network. If these tribals are to be enmeshed into larger communities, the problems posed are different, the basic problem being how to absorb them without subjecting them to exploitation.



Similarly the vast bulk of tribals who are transformed into agricultural labourers, agrestic serfs and cultivators, and/or further into labourers in mines, factories, railways, plantations and other enterprises, are faced with problems which are qualitatively different from their more primitive brethren. In fact their problems are identical with those of agricultural labourers, agrestic serfs, bond-slaves, cultivators, craftsmen and workers belonging to the non-tribal population. "The bare truth is that there is a large section of our population deriving its subsistence from agricultural pursuits, which is exploited in various possible ways by moneylenders, would-be absentee landlords, rack-renters and middlemen".<sup>11</sup> Their problems are similar and for their solution demand the reconstruction of the existing social order into a new one which will not merely protect both tribal and non-tribal population from such exploitation but will also abolish such exploitation.

#### ACUTE CONTROVERSY REGARDING TRIBAL ABSORPTION

(2) The classification of tribals into various categories also poses another significant issue viz., what are the forces which compel the tribals to come under the influence of the non-tribal population living in a higher stage of technological development? If they come under the influence of civilized societies, how are their modes of life modified? Also, what are the forms of cultural contacts between civilized groups and tribal groups? An acute controversy is raging over these problems among various scholars in India. This controversy has gained momentum because it has been claimed that the tribals are aggressively absorbed by the Hindu Society. As Prof. Haimendorf suggests, before the 19th century, there was more or less "frictionless co-existence between tribal folks and Hindu caste society in the truest sense of the word". However, from the 19th century onwards, as a result of the spread of railways and roads, physical isolation was broken, population growth suddenly increased, land-hungry Hindu peasants and moneylenders and traders penetrated into tribal areas. They on one side exploited them, and on the other compelled or coaxed them into abandoning their own cultural traditions and values.

Prof. Haimendrof's statement raises very significant problems. Was the Hindu civilization tolerant, as he formulates, up to the 19th century and became intolerant only afterwards? Is it a fact that tribal assimilation has not been going on or was only marginal during last thousands of years in India?

Studies of the history of the Indian civilization reveal how the growth and the expansion of the Hindu Society was a prolonged and complex process of assimilation, both forcible and peaceful, of the tribal people into the Hindu Society.

The statement made by Prof. Haimendrof unfolds a new field of inquiry. In fact, as history discloses, various methods of tribal assimilation or absorption have been adopted in different societies in different epochs.

#### PROF. BOSE ON TYPES OF TRIBAL ABSORPTION

Prof. Nirmal Kumar Bose in his thought-provoking essay "Hindu Method of Tribal Absorption"<sup>12</sup> has indicated how a study of various methods of tribal absorption deserves more careful attention than has been given up to now. By comparing the Hindu or Brahminical Method of Tribal Absorption with the Soviet Union's method of tribal acculturation he has shown how the method of acculturation of tribal population should be studied in the context of the system of the property-relations within which the tribals have been planned to be absorbed. The tribal acculturation brought about in a society like the ancient Roman Society founded on slavery will be different from that brought about in a feudal society. The mode of tribal acculturation followed in a capitalist society will be different from the above two and also from that of the Society which attempts to build up a social order founded on socialist relations.

The mode of acculturation of the tribal people in India before the 19th century took place within the matrix of a different social order. After the 19th century, it occurred on the basis of a colonial and capitalist matrix. Unfortunately, a large number of missionary reformers, anthropologists and administrators are not inclined to confront this fundamental crucial fact. Similarly our larger number of tribal reformers, administrators, an-

thropologists who work as consultants to the Tribal Welfare organizations do not still pose the problem viz., even after independence whether the difficulties of the tribal people, as a matter of fact of all those who are considered submerged, backward, and exploited strata of the Indian society may be resolved within the framework of social order which is being founded on a mixed-economy, functional planning and profit oriented production for competitive market.

#### EMERGENCE OF A SMALL PRIVILEGED SECTION AMONG TRIBES

(3) The study of the classification of the tribal population has also indicated another fact viz., that even among the tribal population, a peculiar type of stratification has been progressing. On one hand, a small privileged section has been emerging as a result of the advantages of special privileges, education, land-owning or other factors while on the other hand, the vast bulk of the tribals are being hurled into the ranks of the lowest, toiling, exploited classes of the contemporary Indian society. The stratification has crucial significance. The "vocal", "richer", "privileged" minority would inevitably utilize the benefits bestowed on the tribals in the form of special concessions in their game for power. Further they launch programmes and movements in the name of the entire tribal people, but which in reality would serve only their interests. Further, such programmes and movements may also prevent the unification of the tribal groups with non-tribal population whose grievances and demands are common. These grievances can be redressed and demands secured only by joint movements of both tribal and non-tribal population.

#### WELFARE PROJECTS

The Government of the Indian Union has launched various projects for tribal welfare. Some of them we have mentioned earlier. We will briefly enumerate below the principal among others :

(1) A number of multi-purpose Blocks for the tribals for their intensive development.

(2) Training-cum-production centres and subsidies for the development of cottage and village industries in tribal areas with a view to providing them with employment.

(3) Colonization of the tribals—settling of the tribals who are practising shifting cultivation on land. Introduction of improved methods of shifting cultivation which may bring more yield without doing harm to the soil.

(4) Educational facilities—Scholarships, free-studentships and other educational aids.

(5) Establishment of tribal cultural institutes for studying the various cultural problems affecting tribal life.

(6) Reservation of posts in Government services for the tribals.

(7) Enactment of Regulation Acts to counteract exorbitant rates of interest of moneylenders.

(8) Establishment of the office of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes for the enforcement of the safeguards provided for the tribals in the Constitution and for the evaluation of various welfare schemes.

The Second Five-Year Plan allocated Rs. 91 crores for the welfare of the backward classes and about Rs. 39 crores for the welfare of the scheduled tribes.

### INVESTIGATIONS

It would be instructive to study the findings of the Reports of the Commissioner for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes as well as the recently published Report of the study team on the Social Welfare and Welfare of the Backward classes. (To my knowledge these are the only available official documents regarding this study). We will mention the salient points about these Reports below.

(1) The progress achieved during the First Five-Year Plan cannot be properly assessed because the progress made during the first two years was meagre and progress made during the subsequent three years could not be assessed as many state governments had failed to submit the progress reports.

(2) The benefits of the schemes mostly accrues to the "vocal section" of the population only.

(3) Failure of the Employment Exchange in providing jobs to a large number of educated and uneducated tribals enrolled in the register.

(4) Failure of the Tribal Research Institutes in playing a functional role in bringing about the coordination of research with the formulation of welfare planning.

(5) Persistence of exploitation of the tribals by money-lenders and contractors.

(6) Total failure of the training-cum-production centres in either providing successful training or even functioning as production units, thus resulting in the wastage of money.

(7) Meagre provision of cultivable land with other facilities in settling the tribals.

(8) Red-tapism, lack of coordination among different departments resulting in the lapse of grants and untimely supply of materials, etc.

The above observations reveal the superficial and uncoordinated nature of the aid, provided to the tribal population. Such an approach whets the appetite without satisfying it. It thereby creates more acute frustration which is exploited by the "vocal section" of the tribal population for their sectional interests.

#### PROBLEM OF EXPLOITATION

As stated earlier, the problems of vast bulk of the tribal population are basically similar to and bound up with the problems of the vast mass of the exploited and uprooted non-tribal Indian population. As observed in my earlier studies—*Recent Trends in Indian Nationalism* and *Rural Sociology in India*, the problems of the masses including the intensely oppressed tribal population arise from the very character of the social order that is existing and further developing in our country. In fact their problems will only be aggravated within the existing and functioning capitalist social system. Their solu-



tions can be found only when a non-exploitative social order is established.

The problems of the tribal population should not be treated in a superficial symptomatic way. These problems have to be viewed in the context of the present capitalist socio-economic system prevailing in India. The very pressure of the exploitative, competitive, profit-oriented forces of this society will reduce the tribals into objects of capitalist exploitation.

#### FUNDAMENTAL ISSUE

The desperate, violent and militant struggles which are being launched by the tribal population in various areas are revolts directed against the inhuman conditions to which they have been subjected and which are basically perpetuated even after independence. Their problems fundamentally are not whether they should be permitted to practice the habits and customs of leaf-dresses, polyandry, and polygamy or be allowed to continue indulgence in drink or further that their primitive tribal culture including colourful dances should be perpetuated. All these aspects of their life were organically bound up with their tribal mode of subsistence, which is now in the melting pot. The fundamental problems of the tribal population are economic-political. They are problems such as security of job, decent standard of living, easy accessibility to resources of civilized life, acquisition of education which can enable them to decide what customs, what rituals and what aesthetic cultural elements they should retain, eliminate or absorb from their and other cultures. If the prevention of head-hunting practices or human sacrifices (however organic they may be with their tribal life) could be justified on the grounds of 'natural justice', without raising the issues of relativity of morals as asserted by Prof. Haimendorf and his ilk, starvation, exploitation, clothlessness, disease, should be prevented on the same grounds.

The tribal problem is a problem which raises the fundamental issue *viz.*, the issue of the establishment of social order founded on equality of opportunities and elimination of exploitation.



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## *Community Development Projects: A Sociological Analysis*

### THE AIM

The present paper attempts to make a sociological analysis of the Community Development Projects which have been sponsored by the Government of the Indian Union to assist the reconstruction of the agrarian economy and the rural society.

The Planning Commission in their first Five-Year Plan have described the Community Development Projects 'as the method through which Five-Year Plan seeks to initiate a process of transformation of the social and economic life of the villages'.<sup>1</sup> It is, according to a U.N.O. report, 'designed to promote better living for the whole community with the active participation and, if possible, on the initiative of the Community, but if this initiative is not forthcoming, by the same use of techniques for arousing it and stimulating it in order to secure its active and enthusiastic response'.<sup>2</sup> The Community Development Projects are of vital importance, according to Jawaharlal Nehru, 'not so much for the material achievements that they would bring about, but much more so, because they seem to build up the community and the individual and to make the latter the builder of his own village centres and of India in the larger sense'.<sup>3</sup>

### NOVEL NOMENCLATURE

The word 'Community Development' itself is a novel nomenclature in India. As the Report of the Team for the Study of the Community Projects and National Extension Service (popularly known as the Balwantrai Committee Report)

states : "We have so far used such terms as rural development, constructive work, adult education and rural uplift to denote certain of its aspects. The word "Community" has, for the past many decades, denoted religious or caste groups or, in some instance, economic groups not necessarily living in one locality; but with the inauguration of the community development programme in this country, it is intended to apply it to the concept of the village community as a whole, cutting across caste, religious and economic differences. It is a programme which emphasises that the interest in the development of the locality is necessarily and unavoidably common to all the people living there." It is sociologically significant to note that to renovate the agrarian economy and the rural society through the active participation of millions of villagers, the sponsors of this movement could not find an appropriate term in any of the States of India to symbolize this vast process. We will examine the postulates underlying this new connotation of the term "Community" subsequently.

#### INSPIRATION FOR THE MOVEMENT

The Community Development Projects emerged as a result of inspiration from the following earlier experiments:

(i) Intensive rural development activities carried out at Sevagram and the Sarvodaya centres in the Bombay State; (ii) The Firca Development Schemes in Madras; (iii) Experiments to build the community centres for Refugees at Nilokheri and other places; (iv) And more particularly from the Pilot Projects at Etawah and Gorakhpur in the U. P. under the inspiration of Albert Mayers.

The idea also arose out of a realization that various efforts made by the Government departments such as Agriculture, Animal husbandry, Cooperation, Health, Education and others, which were carried on separately, should be coordinated to make them more effective. Further, according to the sponsors of the movement, this programme was launched with a view to changing the very philosophical basis of rural reconstruction. Most of the other institutions approached the village and rural

reconstruction work in a philanthropic spirit. The Community Development Movement wants to create a psychological change in the villagers... It aims at inculcating in the villagers new desires, new incentives, new techniques, and a new confidence so that this vast reservoir of human resources may be used for the growing economic development of the country.<sup>5</sup>

#### INAUGURATION OF THE PROJECTS

The Community Development Programme was inaugurated on October 2, 1952. Fifty-five Community Projects were launched. Each Project's Area comprised about 3000 villages covering an area of 450 to 500 sq. miles, i.e., about 1,50,000 acres with a population of about 2,00,000 persons. A project area was divided into three Development Blocks of hundred villages, each with a population of about 65,000 persons. Each Block was divided into about twenty groups, each containing five villages. Each group of villages was being served by a Gram-Sevak (the village level worker). Of the five villages, one generally became the headquarter of the Gram-Sevak.

The programme launched in 1952 was extended to wider areas at the end of the First Five-Year Plan. 603 National Extension Service Blocks, and 553 Community Development Blocks covering 1,57,000 villages and a population of 88.8 million persons were created. Nearly one out of every three villages in India was brought within the orbit of this Programme.

The Second Five-Year Plan proposed to bring every village in India under this scheme, 40 per cent of the area being brought under a more intensive development scheme. In all, 3,800 additional Extension Service Blocks will be set up, 1,120 of these being converted into Community Project Blocks. The ambitious scheme has, however, been subsequently modified.

#### PHASE OF PROJECTS

The Community Development Programme is broadly divided into three phases, *viz.*, the National Extension phase, the Intensive Community Development Project phase and the

Post-Intensive Development phase. Of course, it is not laid down that everywhere the first two phases must follow each other, the National Extension phase in some areas having been skipped over to usher in the Intensive Community Development Project phase. Usually, the period of the first and the second phase is to last for three years each.

In the first phase, the areas selected are subjected to the method of providing services on the ordinary rural development pattern with a lesser Government expenditure. In the intensive phase, the blocks selected are subjected to a more composite and more intensive development schemes with larger Governmental expenditure. In the post-Intensive phase, it is presumed that the basis for self-perpetuation of the process initiated during the earlier phases has been created and the need for special Government expenses reduced. Slowly the areas are left in the charge of the Departments for the development.

In 1952-53 series of community projects, the provision per block was Rs. 22 lakhs for a period of three years. This was reduced to Rs. 15 lakhs for the 1953-54 series. The present provision for the N.E.S. stage of three years is Rs. 4 lakhs and for the Community Development stage is Rs. 8 lakhs, making up a total of Rs. 12 lakhs for six years. In other words, the annual expenditure per Block was reduced first from Rs. 7.3 lakhs to Rs. 5 lakhs and now to Rs. 2 lakhs.

#### MAIN ACTIVITIES OF THE PROJECTS

An imposing list of activities has been prepared by the sponsors of the Community Development Projects. They include various items connected with the following eight categories of undertakings:

- (1) Agriculture and related matters; (2) Communications;
- (3) Education; (4) Health; (5) Training (6) Social Welfare;
- (7) Supplementary Employment; and (8) Housing.

The fourth Evaluation Report of 1957 adopted different criteria for classifying activities undertaken by the Community Development Projects. It divided the programmes of acti-



vities into the following major categories: (1) Constructional programmes; (2) Irrigation programmes; (3) Agricultural programmes; and (4) Institutional and other programmes.<sup>6</sup> The detailed list of the various activities undertaken under each of these programme is as under:

Constructional Programmes: 'Kutchra' roads, 'Pucca' roads, culverts, drains, pavement of streets, school buildings, community centre buildings, dispensary buildings, houses for the Harijans and drinking water sources.

Irrigation Programmes: Wells, pumping sets, tube wells and tanks.

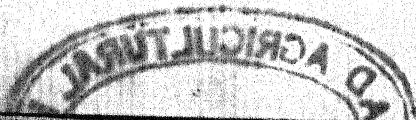
Agricultural Programmes: Reclamation, soil conservation, consolidation of holdings, improved seeds, manure and fertilizer, pesticides, improved methods of cultivation and improved implements.

Institutional and other programmes: Youth Clubs, Women's Organisations, Community Centres, 'Vikas Mandals', cooperative societies, distribution stores, maternity centres, dispensaries, veterinary dispensaries, key village centres, panchayats, adult literacy centres, primary schools, 'dai' training centres, cottage industries, production-cum-training centres, demonstration plots, soakage pits, smokeless 'chulha'.

#### PATTERN OF ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

An elaborate organization has been created to implement Community Development Projects; it is known as the Community Project Administration. Originally functioning under the Planning Commission, it is now under the charge of the newly created Ministry of Community Development.

The entire administration is composed of four major types—the Central administration, the State administration, the District organization and the Project administration. The power and the control flows from top to bottom, making it a hierarchic bureaucratic organization. At every level there is an Executive Officer, functioning with the aid of a Development Committee and helped by an Advisory Board. At the Centre, there is an





Administrator, at the State level there is a Development Commissioner, at the district level there is a District Development Officer of Collector's grade and at the Project level a Project Level Officer equipped with a staff of some 125 supervisors and Village level workers.

#### PROF. DUBE ON CHARACTERISTICS OF ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE

Prof. S. C. Dube finds six significant characteristics of this administrative organization.

"First, in recognition of the necessity of unified and co-ordinated direction of development activities, final responsibility on all the four different levels has been vested in one individual and not in a multiplicity of specialists. Provision, however, has been made for technical consultation and guidance of experts on all the levels.

"Second, in recognition of the necessity of associating non-officials with programme planning, and to a certain extent with programme execution, provision has been made for consultative and supervisory committees to be associated with appropriate officers on all levels.

"Third, in order to cut down red tape and maintain an efficient supply link from the central and state headquarters to the individual projects, sufficiently important officers have been appointed at different levels and direct channels of communication from the highest (Centre) to the lowest (Project) levels have been established. The principle of a teamwork at different levels has also been emphasised.

"Fourth, in view of the very special nature of the work to be undertaken, provisions have been made to organize orientation and training courses for officers on the two lower levels, and for frequent exchanges of views and consultation between officers on the two upper levels.

"Fifth, in order to secure popular participation on the widest possible basis, it was decided to utilize all existing local agencies in the implementation of the development

programme. Where such agencies did not exist or were not adequately developed it was decided to create them.

"Sixth, in recognition of the two important principles of modern public administration, namely of research and progress, an independent Programme Evaluation Organization and methods of Community Development. The findings of this body are expected to lead to a desirable modification of and changes in the organizational set-up and methods of approach."<sup>7</sup>

#### SURVEY OF ACHIEVEMENTS

We will now survey the achievements of this programme. It is extremely difficult to give a total quantitative assessment of these achievements for a number of reasons. First, to the best of present writers' knowledge, such overall data has not been compiled. Second, it is not very easy to separate the achievements of the Community Development Projects from those brought about by other agencies. Some observers have pointed out that a number of activities attributed to the Community Development Project movement should, in fact, be credited to other agencies. We shall, however, accept for the purposes of evaluation, the achievement data in regard to constructional, irrigational, agricultural, institutional and other activities as collected by the Fourth Report of the Programme Evaluation Organization.<sup>8</sup> It is a data carefully collected from seventeen Project units from different states studied by the Project Evaluation Organization.

The impact of the Community Development Projects has been subjected to analysis and evaluation by a number of scholars and organizations. Prof. Wilson, Prof. Carl Taylor, Prof. Oscar Lewis, Prof. Opler and his team, Prof. Dube, Prof. Mandlebaum and many others have attempted to assess the nature of the impact of the Community Development Projects on the life of the rural people. The Programme Evaluation Organization has also been doing assessment continuously and their Reports are valuable documents. The Bench Mark Surveys also provide insight into the workings of the Community

Projects. The popularly known Balwantrai Committee report on the subject is one of the latest authoritative evaluations. Prof. Dube's *India's Changing Villages* is the latest comprehensive and systematic analysis of Community Projects, although based on a very intensive examination of only two different types of villages in U. P. It will be very difficult indeed to adequately indicate here the main findings of these studies and Reports separately. However, a certain general pattern of evaluation emerges which deserves our careful attention.

#### MAJOR POSTULATES ACCEPTED BY EVALUATORS

It should be noted at the very outset that all the scholars and organisations who have evaluated the Community Development Projects, fundamentally accept the major postulates of the economic policy of the Government of India and of the Five Year Plans. Further, all these evaluators have assumed that the Community Development Movement is both desirable and appropriate as a technique of reconstructing the agrarian economy and society of India. Not one of them has even raised a single query or attempted to critically examine the major postulates of the Movement. It is, therefore, necessary to make explicit the major assumptions taken for granted by them. As Prof. Carl Taylor remarks ; "The whole concept and Plan of Community Development-Extension programme is that local self-help Village groups will mobilize their natural and human resources for local improvements of all kinds and all technical agencies of Government will aid them in this undertaking."\* It implies, according to him (i) initiative of people in both formulating and executing the programmes, (ii) therefore the schemes of generating and organizing a large number of voluntary associations almost of primary group nature and also a wide variety of local institutions, (iii) reliance upon group work techniques ; (iv) active participation of people in all the stages of implementation, resulting in local leadership, (v) governmental administrative machinery which acts as an assisting body. The personnel of the administrative machinery, at all levels, should not merely be equipped with administrative and technical skills but must be fairly well-versed in social skills of evoking voluntary association and community participation.

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The philosophy underlying this Movement, in the context of the Indian agrarian society, therefore, implicitly accepts the following major sociological assumptions : (i) the individuals, sections, groups and strata forming the Village Community have a large number of common interests, sufficiently strong to bind them together ; (ii) the interests of the various groups and classes within the village are both sufficiently like and common to create general enthusiasm as well as a feeling of development for all ; (iii) the interests of the different sections of the community are not irreconcilably conflicting ; (iv) the state is a super-class, impartial, non-partisan association and that the major policies of the Government are of such a nature that they do not further sharpen the inequalities between the existing social groups ; (v) peoples' initiative and enthusiasm and active participation are possible in the extant village communities because they have common interests.

None of the scholars or the committees have critically inquired as to whether these assumptions about both the Village Communities in India and the Indian State and its governmental policies are valid.

However, we will review at present only the major findings of these scholars and committees regarding the operation of Community Development Projects and their impact upon the life of the rural people.

Prof. Taylor and most of the scholars feel that the Government machinery, though staffed by intelligent, hard-working and conscientious persons, has not still assimilated the true spirit underlying the entire programme. The Community Development Extension Programme is operated more as an executive assignment. According to Prof. Taylor, the administration of the programme is predominantly based on aid from and reliance on the Government. The initiative of the people is still lacking. The Government machinery relies more on propaganda and spectacular results rather than on group work and voluntary creative participation. According to Prof. Taylor, a certain amount of active governmental participation was inevitable in a country like India during the earlier phases of the movement. But if that earlier phase was not crossed

over and if the movement did not elicit active participation and initiative from the people, the very basis of the Community Development Programme would crumble. The danger has been slowly raising its head.

Prof. S. C. Dube also comes to the same conclusion. "Planning so far appears to be from the top down... It is necessary to examine the implications and results of the present trends in planning. Because of the unique curbs on Project autonomy its officials hesitated to demonstrate much initiative. What was worse they tended on the official level to accept orders from above, i.e., from the state head-quarters, without question or comment, and this despite pronounced private reservations. As an outcome of this trend the officials were oriented less towards the village people, and more towards the pleasing of their official superiors."<sup>10</sup> And further. "A large number of Project-sponsored activities are directed along the lines of traditional government 'drives' rather than according to the proved principles of extension work. Visible accomplishments under such pressure and stimulation and completion of physical targets are greatly valued, and too little attention is given to the question of finding out if the movement is really acquiring roots in the village society."<sup>11</sup> According to Prof. Dube, government servants function as bureaucrats and have not become agents of change with an active social service mentality.

The Balwantrai Committee Report is critical of the structural foundation of the Community Administration. According to the Report,

"admittedly, one of the least successful aspects of the C.D. & N.E.S. work is its attempt to evoke popular initiative. We have found that few of the local bodies at a level higher than the village panchayat have shown any enthusiasm or interest in this work; and even the panchayats have not come into the fields to any appreciable extent. An attempt has been made to harness local initiative through the formation of *ad hoc* bodies mostly with the nominated personnel and invariably advisory in character. These bodies have so far given no indication of durable strength nor the leadership necessary to provide the motive force for continuing the improvement of economic and social condition in rural areas. So long as we do not discover or create a representative and



democratic institution which will supply the local interest, supervision and care necessary to ensure that expenditure of money upon local objects conforms with the needs and wishes of the locality, 'invest it with adequate power and assign to it appropriate finances, we will never be able to evoke local interest and excite local initiative in the field of development."

The report suggests that the elected Village Panchayat at village level and an elected Panchayat Samiti at the bloc level act as agencies to execute the Community Development Programme and the present Bloc level and Village level bureaucratic machinery be wound up.

In short, the major criticism offered by scholars and Evaluating Committees boils down to the following major points : (i) its bureaucratic nature ; (ii) absence of elective principle at any level in the machinery ; (iii) decisions taken at the top and communicated below, almost like executive flats ; (iv) considerable confusion in the overall administration of the country, expressed in the relationship between the Project Administration and other Government departments ; (v) considerable confusion and conflict with regard to powers and duties, and relative position and seniority within the staff of different departments as a result of their being interlocked with the Project Administration ; (vi) duplication of work for a section of the administrative personnel and resultant overworking and the problem of divided loyalty towards functions ; (vii) absence of social service mentality ; and (viii) lack of social work skills among the staff.

With regard to the actual achievement of the Projects, within the cluster of villages operated by a Gram-sevak, his head-quarter-village receives more benefits. Further, it has been found that bigger villages get greater benefits. Similarly, commercial belts receive more facilities than the non-commercial agrarian belts. As the Evaluation Report points out,

"There is wide disparity in the distribution of the achievement and therefore of the benefits of the community project programmes. This disparity exists as between different blocks in the project areas. Within the blocks it exists as between the H.Q. villages of Gram Sevaks, the villages easily accessible to them, and the villages not so easily accessible.



Within the villages, it exists as between cultivators and non-cultivators; and within the cultivating classes, it exists as between cultivators of bigger holdings and larger financial resources and those of smaller holdings and lesser financial resources. This is a matter of serious concern not only in terms of regional and social justice but also in terms of the political consequences that may ensue in the context of the increasing awakening among the people."<sup>12</sup>

Though this disparity of benefits is recognised, none of the scholars or evaluation organizations has made a systematic analysis of its consequences; its ecological repercussions are not even seen by them. The Indian rural society is undergoing transformation under the impact of numerous forces today. Government's programmes of industrialization, electrification, land reforms, major irrigation works, export and import plans, taxation, commercialization and monetization of various sectors of economic life, and unification of the country through development of means of communication, are producing important changes in the agrarian areas also. The impact of urbanization and industrialization upon the pattern of rural life are being studied by a number of scholars. Unfortunately, however, none of the evaluators has analysed the impact of the Community Development Projects upon the rural life from this wider perspective. Nor have these evaluators indicated the significance of this uneven growth of various regions, blocks, and villages.

The advantages of the improvement, as pointed out by the Community Evaluation Reports, are taken by larger cultivators. As Prof. Dube points out,

"Although the ideal of the Community Development Project was to work for the many-sided development of the entire community, from the foregoing account of its work. . . it is clear that its significant and best organized activities were confined to the field of agricultural extension and consequently the group of agriculturist benefited the most from them. A closer analysis of the agricultural extension work itself reveals that nearly 10 per cent. of its benefits went to the elite group and to the more affluent and influential agriculturists. The gains to poorer agriculturists were considerably smaller. . . . For the economic development of this group, as well as for that of the artisans and agricultural labourers, no programmes were initiated by the Project."<sup>14</sup>

Similar observations are made by all the Project Evaluation Reports as well as by scholars like Mandelbaum. This impact of the Community Development Project is fraught with serious consequences. It sharpens the gulf between the rich and the poor cultivators. It makes artisans and agricultural labourers relatively more handicapped than the cultivators and therefore generates greater inequality and wider chasm between the affluent farmers, the agrarian capitalist class on one hand and the poorer strata composed of poor peasants, artisans and agricultural labourers on the other. It implies that in the context of the economy which produces for market and profit, the poor farmers and other strata are made weaker in their competitive strength against the richer strata.

The organizations for rural change are dominated by the upper sections of the rural population. As pointed out by the Programme Evaluation Report, "When one considers the pattern of membership in village organizations, be they cooperative societies, *Vikas Mandals*, Gram Panchayats or Nyaya Panchayats, one clearly finds that the membership is confined to the large cultivators and that the smaller cultivators as well as landless agricultural labourers, have practically no stake in the organizations of the village."<sup>15</sup> As Prof. Dube has pointed out.

"The Community Development Project sought the cooperation of the existing village institutions such as the village panchayat and the adalati panchayat, schools and cooperative societies. Persons holding offices in these bodies or otherwise prominent in the activities were regarded as 'Village Leaders', and the development officials made a special effort to work closely with them. Some others who had contacts with politicians and officials were also included in this category and were consulted in matters connected with the development project.... Thus a group of village people having contacts with the world of officials and politicians largely came to be viewed as the local agents of change.... The first mistake was in assuming that these people were the leaders.... Because of their association with the official and urban ways of life these leaders as a group had come to possess a special status within the community, but the average villager did not trust them without reservations. Some of the common stereotypes regarding government officials applied in a modified form to these village officials who were recognised as having a semi-government status....

Among others included in the category of 'traditional leaders' were the important and influential people in the village. Naturally most of them were from the dominant landowning group. In identifying power and status with leadership, an important and emerging aspect of group dynamics was ignored. . . . The undue emphasis in working with 'traditional leaders' was construed by villagers as an effort on the part of the Government to maintain a *status quo* in the internal power relations within the village communities and indirectly as a step to support the domination of the landowning groups." <sup>16</sup>

The same conclusion is drawn by almost all the evaluators. This reliance on the upper stratum of the village population by the Government has sociological significance which cannot be underestimated. Nay, it has serious social implication in terms of the dynamics of rural society. It implies not merely a hold over the economic resources in that area by a small upper class, but also a hold over the political, social and cultural life of the community. It further means that in agrarian area, as a result of the functioning of the community development programmes, a stratum becomes strengthened economically and politically, and utilizes various institutions for its own end. It also means that in agrarian area, the Community Development Projects are creating an institutional and associational matrix wherein the Government buttresses the economically dominant classes, and in their turn, the economically dominant classes strengthen the power of the present rulers of the State. This development has dangerous significance for the all-round development of the rural society and also for the unprivileged strata of the agrarian area which constitute the bulk of the rural people. It is very unfortunate that the implication of this developmental tendency in terms of class polarization in agrarian area, and the role of the state as an agency of the upper stratum is not fully appreciated.

Almost all the Evaluators have recognised that the contributions to be made by the village people are felt very burdensome by the lower sections of the people. *Shramdan* is the technique by which masses were asked to make contribution to the Community Development. Prof. Dube's observations on *Shramdan* as a voluntary movement of village self-help deserves attention :

"From a close observation and analysis of four *Shramadan* drives. . . certain points emerge that explain differences in reactions to *Shramadan*. The village elite, as well as the upper status groups have, on the whole, welcomed the *shramdan* drives, and through them the construction and repairs of roads. They gained from it in two ways. First, the repaired and newly built roads facilitated the transport of their sugarcane and grain. Secondly, in these drives they could assert their position of leadership and prestige in the village. . . as is explained at some length in Chapter VI, because of their status they assumed supervisory roles in this work, and left the hardest and less desirable part of the job to be done by the people of the lower status and lower income groups. Even their token participation won the praise and acclaim of the officials and outside political leaders. The poorer groups, on the other hand, had no practical and visible gain from these projects. Few among them owned bullock carts, and most of them did not have large quantities of sugarcane or wheat to be transported to the urban markets. Their work did not win much praise from outsiders. All that they got often was a formal acknowledgement from the lower officials and some village leaders. They not only had to work hard, but they also lost the wages for the day, which they otherwise might have earned. This explains why many of them viewed this thing as a revival of *begar* a practice under which influential landowners and government officials compelled the poorer people to work without wages or at nominal wages and which is now prohibited by law." <sup>17</sup>

New associations have been launched or some of the old associations performing those functions have been claimed to be revitalized. Youth clubs, women's organizations, community centres, schools, libraries, adult education classes and social education centres form the predominant type of institutions. These organisations have emerged only in a very few areas. Excepting some institutions like Bhajan Mandalis or Akhadas at some places, very few institutions have taken roots in the villages. A large number of these institutions are operating more as paper organisations. Almost all the evaluators have indicated the failure of this section of the Community Development Programme.

Almost all critics, including Taylor, Wilson, the Balwantrai Committee, Dube and V. K. R. V. Rao, indicate these trends. They criticise one aspect of the programme or the other. They

suggest some symptomatic remedies to cure the ills. Prof. Taylor wants thousands of trained officers, equipped with social skills to make this programme a success. The Balwantrai Committee makes certain proposals for making Village Panchayats and Panchayat Samitis as instruments for operating the Community Development Programmes. It also wants to abolish two-phased division in the form of N.E.S. and C.D. with unequal financial allocations and creation of six year unit with larger financial allocation. Further, it wants the C.D. Programme to concentrate more on select items like increase in production rather than cultural improvements. According to them, there is nothing wrong with the major premise of the Community Development Projects, nor is there any fundamental fallacy in the postulates of the Five Year Plans. According to these evaluators, the failure of the C.D. Projects in essence is due to one or more of the following factors : ignorance, lack of will on the part of the personnel, faulty organizational principles, fatalism of the vast bulk of the people, lack of technical and social skills, or wrong choice in selection of items. According to Prof. Dube, the main obstacles are : "(i) the general apathy of a considerable part of the village population, (ii) suspicion and distrust of officials and outsiders; (iii) failure on the part of the Project to evolve effective and adequate media of communications; (iv) tradition and cultural factors." <sup>18</sup>

Are these costly projects, which do not fulfil their proclaimed major objectives, worth continuing? Are they not becoming agencies which do not merely defeat the very purpose for which they are ostensibly launched, but are actually playing the harmful role of strengthening the richer strata in the agrarian society?

In spite of the fact that considerable factual material has been collected which indicates the class structure of the agrarian society, and which also points out how the agrarian proletariat, a large number of uneconomic holders, and an enormous group of ruined artisans constitute the bulk of the rural community, none of these evaluators confronts the question, *viz.*, how can a programme which essentially supports the upper strata of the rural population and which primarily benefits this minority in strengthening it institutionally, be called a Community Development Programme? The very name, to say the least, is deceptive.



Sociologically, the Community Development Programme is not merely proving futile in its acclaimed goals, but is becoming harmful.

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## *The Problem of Rural Indebtedness upto 1939\**

### SOCIO-ECONOMIC CAUSES OF INDEBTEDNESS

One of the gravest problems confronting those who desire and strive to transform the present poverty-struck and culturally backward Indian Village into a prosperous and progressive centre of agrarian population is the problem of rural indebtedness.

In spite of the amazingly rich natural resources of India, its fertile and varied soil, its mineral treasures, its enormous population, the rural economy of India is on the brink of collapse, its agrarian population in the grip of poverty and misery, its agriculture deteriorating at a fearful rate.

All elements for a prosperous agriculture are present in our land: enormous amount of arable land, a climate warm and varied and suited for the sowing and growth of diverse crops, the existence of tremendous water supply, a huge hard-working peasant population etc.

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[\*The Problem of Rural Indebtedness is discussed here in two chapters. Chapter 6 consists of an article written and published in the form of a pamphlet in the year 1939. It attempts to assess the problem historically and analytically as on that day. Chapter 7 attempts to review the development during the last two decades. It brings the study of the problem up-to-date.

The basic contours of the problem of rural debt have not undergone change in the last two decades. As such, the 1939 pamphlet has been reproduced in the same form in which it appeared then. It has not been altered either in point of time or in point of style. Naturally the references to statistics or to political features have to be construed in the context of that period. So also the present tense applies to the existing situation, then.

*Author]*

*Still* the Indian agriculture is in a backward and deteriorating state. *Still* the Indian Village and its toiling population bear the stamp of devastating poverty.

It is not difficult to locate the main factors responsible for this. Economists, Politicians, Humanitarians, Revolutionaries as well as the Government Officials, have unanimously declared them in the main to be the low level of agricultural technique, the extreme sub-division and fragmentation of land, the sins of omission and commission by the State, and—*the throttling burden of intolerable and hereditarily accumulating debt of the peasant population.*

It is the last factor, the factor of the huge indebtedness of the rural population, which we propose to deal with here.

The indebtedness of the agricultural population is linked up with their poverty in as much as growing poverty drives them more and more to incur debts and the increased indebtedness further aggravates their poverty. To understand the phenomenon of rural indebtedness, it is necessary to study the multiple causes which bring about the impoverishment of the agriculturists.

Why, in spite of the advantage of a tropical climate, fertile soil and rich natural resources, is the Indian agriculturist so desperately poor, the Indian agriculture steadily collapsing?

We shall attempt to give a socio-economic picture of contemporary India; we shall study and sum up the socio-economic conditions in which the agriculturist works, for *that alone* can explain his appalling poverty and resultant indebtedness.

#### INDIA AS AN AGRARIAN COLONY OF BRITISH CAPITALISM

India is primarily agrarian and the rural population form the bulk of the Indian population.

38,979,211	Urban population.
313,858,767	Rural population.
352,837,978	Total population.

Thus 89% of the total population resides in villages and is almost exclusively dependent on agriculture.

The low industrial development of India is not due to any *natural* obstacle to it. All material pre-requisites for the extensive industrialisation of the country (industrial raw materials such as iron, coal, cotton, jute, silk, etc.), even for the construction and development of chemical and metallurgical industries, exist in the country. There is abundance also of water supply sufficient for the manufacture of electric power which, from a single centre, can motivate numerous Indian industries. There also exist material conditions for the establishment and growth of a powerful tractor industry which can raise Indian agriculture (today based on primitive technique) to the status of a mechanized agriculture.

There is, also, in the country, a tremendous surplus of unemployed labour power of millions of population.

So, there is no *natural* reason, climatic, geographical or geological, why India should remain in a backward agricultural stage.

There is, as is well-known, a *social* reason why India is predominantly and ruinously agricultural, why industrial development is low and retarded, why mechanized agriculture is absent, why machine industry and, in general, metallurgical industry are practically undeveloped, why the unlimited natural resources of the land are not fully realized.

The social reason for this is the fact that India is the economic colony of British Capitalism, serving the interests of the latter.

It is not in the interests of British Capitalism to permit unrestricted development of India. It is against the interests of British Capitalism if gigantic industries, chemical, steel, textile, machine and metallurgical, develop in India, for, obviously, that would rival and ruin their British counterparts. It is so simple, so evident, a fact that if India has to be preserved as the main market for the products of the British (both consumers' and producers' goods), no industries should be allowed to be developed in India. The consistent economic policy of British Imperialism in India is to firmly obstruct her free industrial development.

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Not only that. If British Capitalism needs to sabotage the industrial development of India, it also needs to perpetuate and even accentuate the agrarian character of India since British Capitalism, for its home industries, needs enormous quantities of cheap raw materials such as Cotton, Jute etc. India must be *perpetuated* as a reservoir of industrial raw materials, as 'an agrarian appendage of British industries.'

India must be maintained as a predominantly agricultural country and Indian Agriculture must serve the needs of British Industries. The life interests of British Imperialism demand this and if we expect British Imperialism to abandon this basic policy in favour of extensive industrialization of India, we would exhibit our own stupidity.

The inevitable result of this insufficient industrial development of India is *over-pressure on the agriculture*. While population is growing from year to year and millions of artisans being economically ruined in competition with modern industries, are losing their livelihood, Indian industries do not sufficiently develop to absorb the increased population and the mass of ruined artisans. These either become paupers or increase the number depending on land for existence.

#### IMPACT OF BRITISH CAPITALISM ON THE INDIAN SOCIETY

There is the history of the penetration of India by British Capitalism resulting in the progressive impoverishment of the Indian People of which the phenomenon of Rural Indebtedness is a manifestation. It is necessary to briefly review this process.

The economic structure of pre-British Indian Society was quite different from that created by the British conquest and subsequent domination of India.

The basic pillars of Indian Economy were agriculture and handicraft industry. The village was a self-sufficient economic unit. Exchange relations were weakly developed and local production—products of agriculture and handicraft—were locally used excepting a portion which in cash or kind was usurped by the sovereign power or the parasitical feudal intermediary. Since local production was for local use and

locally consumed, there always existed an equilibrium between a proportional development of the two branches of economy, agriculture and handicraft.

Marx, in *Capital* Volume I, gives the following picturesque description of the pre-British Village communities of India :—

“These small and extremely ancient Indian communities, some of which have continued down to this day, are based on possession in common of the land, on the blending of agriculture and handicrafts, and on an unalterable division of labour, which serves, whenever a new community is started, as a plan and scheme, ready cut and dried. Occupying areas of from 100 upto several thousand acres, each forms a compact whole producing all it requires. The chief part of the products is destined for direct use by the community itself, and does not take the form of a commodity. Hence, production here is independent of that division of labour brought about, in Indian society as a whole, by means of the exchange of commodities. It is the surplus alone that becomes a commodity, and a portion of even that, not until it has reached the hands of the State, into whose hands, from time immemorial, a certain quantity of these products has found its way in the shape of rent in kind. The constitution of these communities varies in different parts of India. In those of the simplest form, the land is tilled in common, and the produce divided among the members. At the same time, spinning and weaving are carried on in each family as subsidiary industries. Side by side with the masses thus occupied with one and the same work, we find the “chief inhabitant,” who is judge, police, and tax-gatherer in one, the book-keeper who keeps the account of the tillage and registers everything relating thereto, another official, who prosecutes criminals, protects strangers travelling through, and escorts them to the next village; the boundary man who guards the boundaries against neighbouring communities, the water-overseer, who distributes the water from the common tanks for irrigation; the Brahmin, who conducts the religious services; the schoolmaster, who on the sand teaches the children reading and writing; the calendar-Brahmin, or astrologer, who makes known the lucky or unlucky days for seed time and harvest, and for every other kind of agricultural work; a smith and a



carpenter, who make and repair all the agricultural implements; the potter, who makes all the pottery of the village; the barber, the washerman, who washes clothes, the silversmith; here and there the poet, who in some communities replaces the silversmith, in others the schoolmaster. This dozen of individuals is maintained at the expense of the whole community. If the population increases, a new community is founded, on the pattern of the old one, on unoccupied land. . . . The simplicity of the organization for production in these self-sufficing communities that constantly reproduces them in the same form and when accidentally destroyed, springs again on the spot and with the same name—this simplicity supplies the key to the secret of the unchangeableness of Asiatic societies, an unchangeableness in such striking contrast with the constant dissolution and refounding of the Asiatic States, and the neverceasing changes of dynasty. The structure of the economic elements of society remains untouched by the storm clouds of the political sky."

Since all production was mainly for use, in pre-British India, before the penetration and domination of the economic life of the Indian People, by capitalist economic forms, there was no mass unemployment, no permanent or cyclic economic crisis, no paupers or peasants in a process of pauperization as today. Nor was the monstrous phenomenon of the peasant producer, in mass, caught in the grip of indebtedness, as to-day. True, 'these stereotyped forms', as Marx calls these village communities, were the strongholds of passivity and intellectual reaction;\* still they were economically free from such contrasts

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\* "Now, sickening as it must be to human feeling to witness those myriads of industrious, patriarchal, and inoffensive social organizations disorganized and dissolved into their units, thrown into a sea of woes, and their individual members losing at the same time their ancient form of civilization and their hereditary means of subsistence, we must not forget that these idyllic village communities, inoffensive though they may appear, had always been the solid foundation of oriental despotism, that they restrained the human mind, within the smallest possible compass, making it the unresisting tool of superstition, enslaving it beneath traditional rules, depriving it of all grandeur and historical energies. We must not forget the barbarian egoism which, concentrating on some miserable patch of land, had quietly witnessed the ruin of empires, the perpetration of unspeakable cruelties, the massacre of the population of large towns, with no other consideration bestowed upon them than on natural events, itself the helpless prey of any aggressor who designed to notice it at all. We must not forget that this stagnatory undignified and vegetative life,

of poverty and wealth as we witness to-day. True, there was even then, in those village communities, the moneylender but this ancestor of the present moneylender, though an exploiter since all money-lending implies exploitation, was relatively harmless unlike the latter who, to-day, has in his grip often the entire population of a village, progressively enslaved through money-lending.

We shall briefly state, very briefly, the process of transformation of the self-sufficient village of the pre-British period into the present village, producing for world market, torn with sharp and sharpening class contrasts, the present village is the stronghold of poverty, misery, hunger, starvation, social and economic oppression, as also the potential furnace of agrarian revolt.

With the rapid industrial development in Britain, started the process of the progressively increasing influx of the products of British industries into India, the steady transformation of India into a market of manufactured goods from Britain. British Capitalism pursued ruthlessly the policy of converting India into its monopoly market. The interests of the British industries came in collision with those of Indian Handicraft which supplied mostly the cloth need of the Indian people practically concentrated in villages. For some time, village handicrafts due to local advantages as also due to the low stage of development of the British industries, lack of adequate means of communication, could successfully compete with machine made products. British capitalism was ruthless and used all forms of physical and political oppression to prevent this competition. The notorious instance of the chopping off of the expert thumbs of the handicraft artists of Dacca etc. is only one of the illustrations showing to what extent young

this passive sort of existence evoked on the other hand, in contradistinction, wild, aimless unbounded forces of destruction and rendered murder itself a religious rite in Hindustan. We must not forget that these little communities were contaminated by distinctions of caste and by slavery, that they subjected man to external circumstances instead of elevating man, the sovereign of circumstances, that they transformed a self-developing social state into never-changing natural destiny, and thus brought about a brutalizing worship of nature, exhibiting its degradation in the fact that man, the sovereign of nature, fell down on his knees in adoration of Kanuman (Hanuman) the monkey, and Sabhala (the Cow)."

(K. Marx : *Letters on India*! pp. 8-9)

industrial capitalism of Britain was brutal to capture market for its products. But soon the industrial technique developed, the cost of raw material fell due to fall in transport expenses as a result of railway and steam engine construction and thus the machine-made goods of British Industry could sell cheaper than the handicraft products in the Indian market. The latter industries which had lasted for centuries and seemed almost immortal were unable to withstand the competition of modern machine industry and collapsed.

The history of last hundred years is the history of the ruination of millions of handicraftsmen, artisans, and the rest who, in absence of the proportionate industrial development obstructed by the British Government to safeguard the market interests of British industries, crowd on land depending for maintenance on an already declining agriculture. *This army of ruined artisans reinforcing the number of people already dependent on land, increased the poverty of the rural population, the prime cause of their huge indebtedness.*

The impact of British conquest of India led also to other results. By disintegrating the self-sufficient village community it destroyed the security and stability of the peasant producer, impoverished him and made him the debt-slave of the money-lender. This is how it happened :—

In the pre-British period, the State exacted revenue from the village community as a whole, and not from the individual farmer separately. A certain portion of the village products, in kind or in terms of money, was to be handed over to the State. It was for the village community to determine the share of its every member in this collective tribute to be paid to the State. It was apportioned according to the realized product of each peasant family. This led to the result that the peasant producer was not stranded, did not feel the necessity, in adverse times, of borrowing heavily (beyond normal borrowing for productive purposes which he could repay) from the money-lender as subsequently, when the British Government refused to recognize the village community as the collective spokesman and dealer of the village, entered into separate and



individual agreements with the agriculturists,\* imposing severe land taxes not on the basis of actually realised annual products but on the productive capacity of the soil as assessed by the Government officials, disregarding the years of calamity such as draught etc. inevitable in a country like India where there is not comprehensive system of irrigation works.

This direct linking of the farmer with the State, this fixing of the land revenue in terms of money and on the basis of the product, the progressive increase in land revenue while productivity of the soil continually declined as a result of the steady impoverishment of the agriculturists, this One Act of the British Capitalist Government of India has played a decisive role in bringing the toiling rural population in the strangling grip of the village Sahukar, in producing the mass indebtedness of the peasant population.

The agriculturist had to pay, under the new system, land revenue (in form of definite sum) to the Government every year irrespective of whether the annual crop was successful or not. In a country like India where there is no extensively ramified irrigation system guaranteeing security against absence of or insufficient rains, where even in normal year he realises a meagre sum for his crops in the Indian or world market,† it is inevitable that *sooner or later* the agriculturist is unable to meet the annual demand of the State, is obliged to borrow and become a permanent debtor of the money-lender.

Thus, the grim story of the colossal, unredeemable and strangling indebtedness of the Indian Agriculturists is simple. We shall further enumerate other causes which have accelerated and accentuated this indebtedness.

In the pre-British period, there was unity of agriculture and industry. The self-sufficient village economy was based on the union of handicraft and agriculture. The agriculturist exchanged a portion of his product with the village weaver

\* We refer here to the Ryatwari system under which the cultivators are directly connected with the State, reserving the Zamindari or the Landlord system for subsequent discussion.

† The peasant produces for the market and has to compete with formidable international rivals, like big agrarian trusts which produce on a mass scale and by means of tractors in contrast to the Indian peasant with his miserable strip of land and equipped with primitive plough.

who supplied him with cloth for his family. More often, the peasant family itself produced cloth to meet its need.

This unity of agriculture and industry was disrupted by the influx of machine-made goods in the village market. Steadily the handicraft industry declined in the village and the agriculturist became dependent on the machine-made goods which he could purchase only with money. On one side, due to the inexorable and exorbitant demands of the State whose periodical revision of the land tax only increased the tribute which the agriculturist had to pay to the Government, the income of the peasant steadily declined. On the other hand, due to ruination of the handicrafts by the irresistible inroads of machine goods in the village, the agriculturist had the need of money with which alone he could buy cloth and other necessities, necessities which previously local handicraftsmen supplied him in exchange for a portion of his own agricultural products.

This further made it necessary for the agriculturists to borrow frequently and latterly permanently, from the Sahukar, the tangles of whose predatory money-lending activity closed more and more round the toiling rural population.

So far, we have analysed the conditions of the mass of peasants who are petty proprietors of the land which they cultivated and who directly pay land-revenue to the Government. These are the toilers who own the means of production (land) which they operate, but who, due to the causes mentioned above (heavy and progressively increasing land-revenue, debt accumulated for decades, primitive agricultural implements which they cannot discard for more advanced ones due to poverty, world agrarian crisis which has reduced even the meagre income of the colonial farmers etc.) are in a state of harrowing poverty.

These are the agriculturists who live under what is known as the Ryotwari System or the land revenue system under which the agriculturist deals directly with the Government.

Under the Zamindari System which prevails in about one-third of British India, the agriculturist is not directly linked with the State. The agriculturist is only the tenant and the Zamindar the owner of the land. Under this system, the



Zamindar or the landlord extracts land-rent from the agriculturist and has to pay a fixed sum annually to the State as revenue.

The conditions of these millions of tenants (over one-third of India, comprising Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, U. P., C. P., portions of Madras etc. the Zamindari prevails) who cultivate their master's land, are desperately poor. The demands made on them by the parasite landlords are characterized by such brutality that life for these millions has become intolerable. The practice of renting and further sub-renting of the land has created a chain of parasitic intermediaries who thrive by most inhuman exploitation of the agriculturists. To meet the demands of these band of rapacious exploiters, the agriculturist long ago had to resort to borrowing and has already been converted into a permanent debt-slave of the village usurer who is often the same landlord whose land he tills.

One peculiarity of the Zamindari system is that while they have to pay a definite sum annually to the Government, there is no legally imposed limit to what they extort from their tenants. Under the Zamindari System (for instance the Permanent Revenue Settlement which created the class of Bengal landlords) the revenue due from the Zamindar cannot be increased but he may enhance the rent of his tenants every twelve years. This legal freedom enjoyed by the Zamindars to increase rent from the tenant coupled with the fact that his greed is insatiable, results in the tenant being bled white, always on the brink of starvation and progressively passing in the ever-tightening grip of the village Shylock.

By creating the predatory class of Zamindars, British Imperialism has aggravated the exploitation of the section of the Indian Peasantry living under the Zamindari System. These millions of toiling tenants, serfs of the Zamindars and debt-slaves of the money-lenders in one, not only pay tribute to the Imperialist Government which is included in the total land-tax they pay to the Zamindars but also an ever-expanding rent to the Zamindar himself. While their fellow tillers of land in the Non-Zamindari Ryotwari tracts have to satisfy the demands of the Imperialist Government, these tenants, serfs and debt-slaves in one, have to meet the definite claim of the Govern-

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ment (a part of the land revenue collected from the tenants which the Zamindars hand over to the State) but also to feed the unlimited greed of the parasitic landlords. This double exploitation (frequently manifold since the system of subletting has created an army of parasitic intermediaries between the arch-parasite Zamindar and the toiling tenant) of Zamindars and British Imperialism has plunged these agriculturists in the nethermost depths of poverty and indebtedness.

In addition to the land-tax, which is already unbearable, there are a host of taxes on articles of general consumption which the peasants have to pay. Even the Simon Report alludes to the "grave inequalities which prevail in the distribution of taxation."

"A poor cultivator, who not only pays to the State a substantial portion of his income from land, but also bears the burden of the duties on sugar, kerosene oil, salt and other articles of general consumption, seems to receive very different treatment from the big Zamindar or landholder in areas where permanent settlement" prevails, who owns extensive estates for which he may pay to the State a merely nominal charge fixed over a century ago and declared to be unalterable for ever, while his agricultural income is totally exempt from income-tax."—(Report of the Indian Statutory Commission, 1930).

The State monopoly of the forests prohibiting the people from picking wood for fuel or construction purposes forces the peasant to use cow-dung for fuel instead of utilizing it as manure. This is one of the factors leading to the impoverishment of the soil. This reduces the returns from the land and further increases the poverty of the Indian peasant.

It is obvious that the agriculturist who cannot provide enough food for himself and his family, would be unable to keep his livestock (which in addition to himself and his family constitute his total labour power) in a fit condition. While the bullocks multiply, the nourishment that they receive, diminishes. This leads to the village being "overstocked with herds of wretched, starving cattle" (Report of the Royal Commission of Agriculture) and accelerates the exhaustion of the soil.

Add to this the factors of the growing population, of the increasing ruination of millions of artisans which, in absence of flourishing and rapidly expanding industries to incorporate the 'surplus' population, only increase the number of those dependent on land. This has led to the increasingly minute fragmentation of land, the average peasant holding being only five acres.

On the basis of this tiny holding, cultivating with the primitive plough and famished bullocks, without any state aids in the form of scientific manures or advanced implements, the agriculturist has not only to maintain himself, his family and his bullocks but also to pay land revenue, water rate and a host of local cesses to the Government or rent and other auxiliary forms of tribute to the Zamindar which swallow a substantial portion of the value of his crops. The ever existing and growing disparity between his income and the claims he has to meet, forces the agriculturist to contract debts, even the interest on which he is unable to pay.

So on one hand, the burdens of the Imperialist Government, of the Zamindar and the moneylender, are increasing, the income of the peasant is diminishing due to the exhaustion of the soil, due to lack of proper manure, due to deterioration of livestock which the peasant cannot renew, due also to the growth of persons dependent on land for maintenance ("overpressure on agriculture"). The income of the colonial Indian peasant is further hit by the disastrous decline in the prices of agricultural products due to the world economic crisis which broke out in 1929. This is how Varga, the celebrated world economist, describes the effects of the crisis on the colonial producers:—

"The colonies are most acutely affected by the crisis..... Capital in the imperialist countries shifts a considerable part of the crisis burdens to the colonies and hence the crisis is especially deep and devastating there. The most important factors in this situation are the following:—

"(a) The overwhelming majority of the colonies and semi-colonies are *agrarian countries*. They, therefore, suffer the full force of the chronic agrarian crisis and its accentuation as a result of the industrial crisis.

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"(b) Imperialism has largely turned the colonies into raw material appendages of the home countries. A number of colonies and semi-colonies are one-crop countries, whose economic life depends on the sale of one (or a few) commodity in the capitalist world.....These countries are extraordinarily limited in their opportunities for economic manœuvring. Overproduction has led to an enormous drop in prices, which is ruining them. They now have to sell two to six times the quantity of their major commodity to industrial countries for the same amount of money they received before the crisis. In consequence their export surplus no longer sufficed to meet the interests on their foreign debts; their balance of payment became unfavourable, and they were, therefore, compelled to turn over their gold reserves, small as they were, to the imperialist usurers. In this way they fall into still greater dependence on the latter accumulating to inflation, which makes the burden of their debts (contracted in foreign currency) even heavier.

"Let us take India as an example.

Foreign Trade of India, Year Ending March 31.  
(Millions of rupees)

	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933
Net export surplus	...	860	790	620	348
Net gold imports	...	212	143	125	—
Net gold exports	...	—	—	—	580
					683

"(c) The price "scissors," which accentuates the crisis in agrarian countries, in general strikes the colonies with particular force.

Price Indices (1913 = 100)

	U. S. A.	Germany	England	Colonial commodities			
	Manufac- tures.		Pig- iron	Coal	Indian Cotton (London)	Jute (London)	Tea (New York)
1929	136	157	132	122	114	102	138
1930	127	150	126	120	74	69	112
1931	111	186	110	114	59	54	74
1932	101	119	109	113	65	52	65
							33

"These figures, however, are far from giving a correct picture of the increase of the non-equivalent exchange between the colonies and the imperialist countries during the crisis, since they give the prices received by the European dealers in colonial products, *i.e.*, the prices ruling on the exchanges. The prices the peasant received in the colonies dropped even lower. With the prevailing oversupply the big international monopolies, such as Unilever, themselves fix the prices that their buyers are to pay for the commodities in the colonies.

"Capitalism has succeeded in somewhat easing the position of industry.....*at the expense of the peasants in the colonies and in the economically weak countries* by still further forcing down the prices of the product of their labour, principally of raw materials, and also of foodstuffs."

"(d) Most of the colonial and semi-colonial countries either have a silver currency, or silver (sometimes, as in China, copper as well) forms the legal circulating and paying medium at home, while a formal gold-standard exists in commerce with foreign countries. The tremendous fall in the prices of silver, during the crisis enabled the imperialist countries to obtain raw materials from these countries at exceptionally low prices.

*"These factors resulted in the rapid impoverishment of the colonial peasantry;* accelerated transfer of the land to the hands of the landlords, a growing hunger for land; growing "over-population" in the countryside, which is enhanced by the accelerated return to the land of urban artisans ruined by the development of domestic capitalist industry and by foreign competition, as well as of workers thrown out of employment by the industrial crisis.

"Impoverishment is further intensified by the manifold exploitation of the peasantry. The feudal landowners, village usurers, the native and imperialist bourgeoisie exploit the colonial peasantry in various ways.

"The disadvantages of the capitalist mode of production, with its dependence of the producer upon the money price of his product, thus coincide here with the disadvantages arising from the imperfect development of the capitalist mode of production.

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"The general characterization of colonial economy by Marx is even more true of the era of crisis. Chronic starvation and periodically recurring famine are now the lot of hundreds of millions of colonial peasants. Slavery is on the increase; it is an everyday occurrence for parents to sell their daughters into slavery. ;

*"The degradation of agriculture is especially pronounced in the colonies. The manifold exploitation of the peasants deprives them of so much of their hard-earned income that they are not even able to continue the process of simple reproduction."*

Varga sums up the social effects of the crisis thus :—

"Although all agricultural producers are affected by the fall in prices, by the growing burden of too high rents, intolerable debts and high taxes, it is a matter of course that (except for agricultural labourers) the crisis hits the middle and small peasants worst of all. The reasons for this are as follows:

"(a) The production costs of the small farm are higher than those of the capitalist large-scale farm. With the present state of prices the peasant produces at a loss, at a price level of agricultural commodities, allowing big farms to yield a profit.

"(b) The rent paid by the peasant as tenant of a landlord's acreage is always "usury rent" in the sense that it not only swallows the excess of appropriated surplus value over and above the average profit, but the entire profit and even part of the wages as well.

"(c) The rate of interest that the toiling peasants must pay the small provincial savings bank and village money-lenders is usurer's interest; it is considerably higher than the interest the big landowner pays on his mortgage, obtained at the original source.

"(d) The "price scissors" hits the middle or small peasant much harder than it does the big producer, since the former is obliged to sell his commodities to the provincial trader (whose debtor he very often is) below the prevailing market price, or else his selling price is dictated by the big monopolies. At the same time he buys his manufactured

articles from middlemen at higher prices. For the toiling peasants, therefore, the gap in the "price scissors" is much wider than that in the official indices based on the wholesale prices. When the minimum prices for agricultural produce are fixed by the state, they are gotten only by the big landowners and the rich peasants, whereas the middle and the small peasants have to sell their produce cheaper.

"(e) The taxes the toiling peasants have to pay are considerably higher per acre or in proportion to their income than those paid by the landowners and rich peasants, who are able, through their dominating position in the governmental and communal machinery, and through their "connections", to shift the tax burden largely to the shoulders of the toiling peasantry.

"(f) Ninety-nine percent of the aid which the capitalist state offers "agriculture" in the form of cheap credit, remission of debts, subsidies, and so on, is obtained by the big landlords and rich peasants; the toiling peasants are left empty-handed.

"Thus the agrarian crisis hits the middle and poor peasants most heavily all along the line.

*"The effects of the agricultural crisis can, therefore, be formulated from the class point of view as follows :*

"The process of continued differentiation characteristic of all capitalism—the sinking of part of the middle and poor peasants into the ranks of the village poor and the proletariat, and the rise of the very tiny section into the ranks of the rich peasantry—is intensified in agrarian crisis to the point of *mass ruin of the poor and middle peasants*. The toiling peasants are expropriated at a rapid rate. More and more of the land passes into the hands of the banks, usurers and speculators; the former owner becomes an exploited tenant on what was formerly his own land.

"The degradation of agriculture strikes the middle and small peasants most of all. Their income - after deducting taxes, rent and interest—is not enough to maintain simple reproduction even in spite of the greatest personal privations and the strenuous labour of the entire family. Worn-out machinery cannot be renewed, livestock that dies cannot be

replaced. The peasant incessantly sinks lower and lower into hopeless misery.

"This holds true for the "independent" middle and small peasants. The situation of the village poor, who cannot live without extra earnings from wage labour, is desperate."

If we retrospect the years of the crisis, the most appalling fact which strikes us is the frightful rate at which the indebtedness of the peasant has grown during these years. While even the prosperous insignificant strata of the rural populations had to draw on their last reserves, gold and silver hoardings of modest value to meet the crisis, it is not surprising that the poor and middle layers of the peasantry together with the swelling army of land-labourers (at the frightful rate of five millions per year), should resort to desperate borrowing, thus degenerating into hopeless and confirmed debt-slaves of the money-lender.

One significant thing about these debts is that the peasant, in lieu of the interest on debt which he cannot partially or completely pay or due to need for money to buy seeds and other pre-requisites, sells his crop *in advance*, even before it has materialized, to the moneylender. The latter most brutally exploits this helplessness and necessity of the farmer and makes the advance purchase of the crop at a rate below the current or expected one. This only precludes the peasant from realizing the value of the crop even at the normal market rate. This only further increases his poverty and his not-to-be shaken dependence on the village Octopus within the present system.

Thus numerous factors, from the unconscious action of the anarchic capitalist world market to the conscious action of the Imperialist State, Zamindar and the Moneylender, explain the poverty of the Indian peasant, the exhaustion of the soil under cultivation, the exhaustion also of the bullocks and general livestock and above all the degeneration of the rural economy—the basic pillar and form of the economic life of a colonial country. The income diminishes, the claims increase and the peasant is ever obliged to borrow.

This is what Sir M. Visvesvaraya remarks about the seriousness of the problem of indebtedness:—

“The magnitude of rural indebtedness and its effect on the agricultural economy of India have been examined in recent years by several expert Committees... This debt may be taken at Rs. 950 crores, or about Rs. 50 per head of the agricultural population of British India. The estimate was made three years ago. Assuming that the debt has not grown in the meantime, the burden of that debt on the agriculturists at present, in view of the precipitous fall in the value of agricultural prices, would be one and a half times as heavy as it would be in a normal year. This figure has only to be taken in connection with the per capita income of the agriculturists in India, which is estimated at Rs. 50 annually, in order to fully realize their difficulty in meeting the heavy burden of debt.” (Planned Economy for India.)

And this is what Prof. Brijnarayan writes about the magnitude of the rural indebtedness in India:—

“The Central Banking Enquiry Committee estimated the rural indebtedness of India at about 900 crores. The figures for the different Provinces, as given by the Committee, are reproduced below:—

*Total Rural Indebtedness*

Assam	..	..	..	22	crores
Bengal	..	..	..	100	„
Bihar and Orissa	..	..	..	155	„
Bombay	..	..	..	81	„
Burma	..	..	..	50-60	„
Central Areas	..	..	..	60	„
Central Provinces	..	..	..	36	„
Coorg	..	..	..	35-55	lakhs
Madras	..	..	..	150	crores
Punjab	..	..	..	135	„
United Provinces	..	..	..	124	„

“These estimates relate to the year 1929. On account of the fall of prices since 1929, the real burden of the debts has considerably increased. For example, a debt of 135 crores

(Punjab) in 1929 is equal to more than 270 crores at the present time." (India in the Crisis)

### QUACK SOLUTIONS

This steady growth of poverty of the rural masses and the rapid decay of the productive forces in the countryside are recognized and universally admitted. Various programmes have been suggested and launched to solve the agrarian problem for last many years, to stem the decline of agriculture, to increase the productivity of the peasant labour, to alleviate the burden of peasant indebtedness, to raise the income and the purchasing power of the peasant masses.

Nevertheless, the problem—even the sponsors of these programmes will admit—remain unsolved or rather assumes more bewildering, almost Sphinx-like, form.

For last many years, various groups have tried various programmes to solve the agrarian situation grown critical, to realize the dream of a progressive and prosperous countryside. Various friends of the peasant masses, the Government, reformist organisations like Servants of India and People's Societies, Holy Christian Missionaries and, after that, the Indian National Congress with the redoubtable friend of the masses, Gandhi, have been strenuously attempting to solve the agrarian problem.

But the problem defies all solution. The dream of a progressive and prosperous countryside still remains a dream. Instead, the nightmare of an utter collapse of agrarian economy and the spectre of a peasant revolt are rising.

Village Co-operative Societies have been tried. Mortgage Banks have been tried. Model Farms Scheme inciting the poor peasants to indulge in the futile attempt to modernize his farm, has been tried. And lastly, the Congress, the impartial friend both of the peasants and the Zamindar, has been trying the Village Reconstruction Programme of resurrecting the ghost of the defunct industries of the past, to solve the rural problem.

Not only that. There have emerged in the country groups who, after a profound analysis, came to the conclusion



that all the economic misery of the masses is due to the lack of ethical quality and literacy among them. The ethical and cultural programmes of contentment, abstinence from Alcohol, village literacy adumbrated by these groups, have been tried.

Still the problem resists solution. Nay, it is growing more knotty as every year elapses.

The common point about all these programmes is that they strive to solve the agrarian problem within the framework of the present economic structure, without disturbing the present economic relations, without touching the landowning and usury systems.

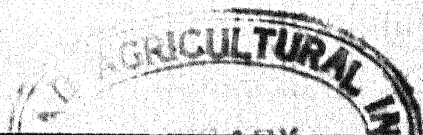
It is not necessary to inquire into and prove the futility of such obviously irrelevant programmes as abolition of illiteracy, to solve essentially economic problems. These programmes, seeking ethical or cultural solution of the economic problem, need not be seriously discussed.

We shall only evaluate those programmes which, though futile, embody economic suggestions and command weight in the country.

The principal among these programmes are the Village Reconstruction Scheme of the A.I.V.I.A. and the agricultural programme of the Government.

The All India Village Industries Association has been organized on the initiative of M. Gandhi with the declared object of emancipating the village from dependence on machine goods, of reviving dead or dying pre-capitalist artisan and other industries, of overcoming the poverty of the rural population by a scheme of Village Autarchy whereby the village will practically produce all its necessities and abolish or minimise all exchange with the outside world. According to M. Gandhi and his co-workers, the programme above chalked out will solve the entire agrarian problem, will liquidate unemployment and ghastly poverty rampant in the rural area and elevate the villager to a plane of economic security, moral richness and physical strength.

This programme of economic retrogression ignores the fundamental fact of history and life. It wants to go against



the inexorable fundamental economic laws which govern social existence. It strives to revive technique and economic forms which have been superseded by more advanced technique and economic forms in historical development. It breaks itself against the facts of life, the onward tendency of history and life.

That is why with a Mahatma at the head of this organization, the programme has made no headway in the country.

The pre-capitalist artisan and other village industries which this programme seeks to revive perished in an unequal struggle against the modern machine-based industries. The historical strength of the machine industries lay in the fact that its products were cheaper than those of handicrafts. In a society based on exchange of products, only those forms of production *are* selected in economic struggle which satisfy human wants with minimum of labour. In a society based on market, cheaper products will always prevail and oust the dear ones.

It is due to the action of this iron law of economic selection that artisan industry disappeared out of existence and modern machine-based industry came to stay.

How could those dead or dying industries of the medieval past be now revived?

Why, even to-day, the poor farmer buys, when he can, machine-made goods in the market in preference to non-machine products? It is because he finds the former cheaper than the latter.

It is undeniable that the machine-made goods are less costly than the products of artisan industries. That is why the poor rural population buys the former in spite of all propaganda of the A. I. V. I. A., in spite of all personal appeals of the Mahatma on moral grounds.

It is not, as some argue, that the rural masses do not understand their interests and buy what is economically ruinous for them. The poor farmer whose income is scarcely Rs. 3 per month, buys, when he can, what is cheapest in the market.

If village industries were really in the interest of the consumers, they would not need to be recommended, especially when the people, enveloped in extreme poverty, would naturally, almost instinctively, buy the products of these industries.

History has eliminated the village industries because they were less economical. It is not possible to revive them for poverty-stricken millions have no means to indulge in the luxury of aiding the growth of the dying indigenous industries by paying high prices for their products.

How can they, when they have no sufficient food to eat?

It is not possible to revive the economic system extinguished in the normal course of historical development. In historical progression, pre-capitalist handicraft were superseded by modern industries.

It is only the economic system with a higher productivity of labour which is selected in the struggle between different such systems. This is why Lenin warned the Communists in Russia after seizure of power that unless socialist economy proved in practice that it had higher productivity of labour than that of capitalist economy, it will not be able to defeat and oust Capitalism in spite of power being in the hands of the proletariat.

But in India, Gandhi and others want to revive the handicrafts which based on backward technique and wasteful methods of production have a lower productivity of labour than modern industries which in spite of their capitalist way of organization are based on advanced machine technique and sound organization. And this, too, without State power in their hands!

These are all unhistorical attempts, against the stream of normal economic evolution. As such, they make no headway.

Apart from this fundamental historical reason, deep and immeasurable poverty of the Indian masses is another reason why the reactionary programme of the A. I. V. I. A. cannot work. When 90% of the population hover on the brink of starvation, when they have no wherewithal to buy even cheap machine-made goods, how can they afford to purchase the

products of village industries, which, due to their backward technique, cost more ?

To argue that the strengthening of the village industries will overcome poverty is to blame the masses that they do not understand their real economic interests. The naked fact is that machine-made goods are cheaper than those of village industries. That is why the masses purchase the former and village industries are rapidly dying out.

In fact, as we have already seen, the root cause of the poverty of the peasant masses is excessive land-revenue, high rents and monstrous indebtedness from which the peasants suffer.

Not a word about these basic factors making for the poverty of the agriculturists in the programme of this Association !

In fact, the village usurer who to-day is the blood-sucker, bleeding white the entire toiling village population, is extolled in following terms by Prof. Malani in his brochure on "Rural Indebtedness" published by All India Congress Committee.

"The moneylender is the foundation of rural credit and in the financing of agricultural operations, he is indispensable . . . . . The *sahukar* is undoubtedly the mainstay of agricultural credit and it is difficult to imagine how agricultural operations can be carried on without his help. It is true, he charges a heavy rate of interest but the risks he runs due to the poverty, ignorance and irregularity of the *ryot* are also heavy. Quite a considerable percentage of his interest is in reality a legitimate charge of insurance against the risk of losing his capital. . . . . The *shahukar* is not the monster of inequity which popular imagination has painted him to be, but is the creation of his environment in which the helplessness and ignorance of the *ryot* are dominating factors. . . . . In our opinion, the problem lies not in breaking the moneylender but in restoring the old, friendly relations between them. . . . . The *shahukar* is a little oasis of thrift and capacity in a vast desert of rural improvidence and helplessness."

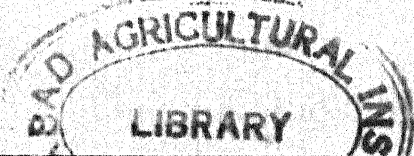
Incredible as it is, this is the estimate of the moneylender, the most hated person in the village, by the writer who repre-



sents the official view of the present leadership of the Indian National Congress. This most inhuman exploiter is eulogised as "Oasis of thrift and capacity in the vast desert of improvidence and helplessness"! Yes, he is a paragon of thrift who hoards every pice which he wrings out from the starving agriculturist! A marvel of capacity, too, capacity for unlimited brutality in his dealings with his victims!

The programme of A. I. V. I. A. does not touch the real causes of the poverty and indebtedness of the rural masses. Since the village industries have not a ghost of a chance to survive in competition with the modern industries, all claim that they could solve the problem of rural unemployment is false. Since, rural unemployment is due to the ruination of millions of artisans engaged in handicrafts and since it is impossible to prevent the annihilation of artisan industries from competition with the modern mechanical industries, the only way to provide work to these rural millions is extensive development of industries in the country. But the British Government guarding the interests of British industries does not and cannot permit the unrestricted and extensive development of Indian industries which would compete with and oust British manufactures in the country. Hence, the problem of rural unemployment remains unsolved. Instead of fighting more energetically the political obstacle to the industrial-economic development of India, British Dominion, the founders of A.I.V.I.A. propose reactionary ways out of the impasse, the road of return to the Past. But India is already drawn into the orbit of world market and the creation of a self-sufficient Village even if it were desirable, is not possible.

How can the agriculturist freely dispose of his products even on the line suggested by the champions of A. I. V. I. A. programme i.e., for meeting his own needs and those of the village people, when the moneylender seizes the crop in lieu of the interest due from the agriculturists? How can the agriculturist detain his crops for fulfilling the programme of the A. I. V. I. A., when he is forced to sell them in the market to pay land-revenue or Zamindar's rent? Where is the legal freedom to the peasant for the free economic use of the products he raises on the land?





The reorganization of the village economy even on lines formulated by the A. I. V. I. A. pre-supposes the annulment of all debts, all rent, and substantial reduction of the land-revenue which the agriculturists have to pay. Then alone, the premise is created even for achieving the reactionary and anarchic dream of Village Autarchy.

The whole programme of A. I. V. I. A. is at best Utopian, and only serves to create among the exploited peasants, illusions of economic liberation without disturbing the unbearable claims of parasitic landlordism, usury capital and Government on the meagre and ever-diminishing income of the agriculturist.

Since the programme does not touch the essential causes of rural poverty, it has evoked no response from the masses of village population. In fact, despite years of systematic, strenuous and heavily financed campaign to popularize and fulfil it, the rural masses have remained cold to it. Instead, these masses are rapidly rallying round the programme of Kisan Sabhas which seek to mobilize them on a class basis and lead them in a struggle for the abolition of landlord and usury system as the only means to solve their poverty and misery.

We shall next consider in broad outlines the agrarian programme of the Government.

#### THE AGRARIAN PROGRAMME OF THE GOVERNMENT

The attempt made by the Government to restore the decaying agrarian economy and solve the problem of rural indebtedness, by means of a series of legislative measures reinforced with numerous agricultural programmes, have likewise met with no success.

The Royal Commission of Agriculture appointed to investigate into the conditions of the countryside, evaluates the legislative efforts to curb indebtedness in the following terms:—

“To a very great extent, the cultivator in India labours not for profit nor for a net return, but for subsistence. The crowding of the people on the land, the lack of alternative

means of securing a living, the difficulty of finding any avenue of escape and the early age at which a man is burdened with dependents, combine to force the cultivator to grow food wherever he can and on whatever terms he can. When his land has passed into the possession of his creditor, no legislation will serve his need, no tenancy law will protect him; for food he needs land and for land he must plead before a creditor to whom he probably already owes more than the total value of the whole of his assets. That creditor is too often a landlord of a different class who has no natural or historical connections with his estates and is only interested in the immediate exploitation of the property in his control."

How the indebtedness ever piling up and reaching a certain level transforms the agriculturist into a virtual slave of the landlord creditor is thus described in the Report:—

"Of the extreme to which economic servitude can extend, where the moneylender's grip is strong, two instances may be given. In Bihar and Orissa, we were told of a system known as *kamiauti* which prevails in the north of the Hazaribagh district and in the Palaman district of Chota Nagpur and in some parts of Bihar, and which is practically one of cultivation by serfs." *Kamias* are bound servants of their masters; in return for a loan received, they bind themselves to perform whatever menial services are required of them in lieu of the interest due on the loan. Landlords employing labour for the cultivation of their private land prefer to have a first call on the labourers they require, and hence the practice arose of binding the labourers by means of an advance, given conditionally upon their services remaining always at the call of the landlord for the purpose of agriculture. Such labourers get a daily wage in kind for those days on which they work for their creditors, and may work for anybody else when they are not required by him. In practice, the system leads to absolute degradation of the *kamias*. In the first place, the *kamia* cannot bargain about his wages, he must accept the wage that is customary for landlords to give to his class. The wages represent only one-third of the day's wage for free labour hired, for example, by a contractor for road repair work. If the *kamia's* wife also works for his master, she receives a slightly

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smaller remuneration and their joint wages are not sufficient to feed properly themselves and the normal family of children they are certain to possess. The *kamia* never sees any money, unless it be the occasional few pice he may earn in his spare time. Consequently, he has no chance of ever repaying the principal of his debt and becoming a free man again. A *kamiauli* bond, therefore, involves a life sentence.

"The condition becomes hereditary. Although the son is not responsible for his father's debt after his death, a new debt is always contracted on behalf of the son on the occasion of his marriage, which renders him also a *kamia* for life. Daily work is not guaranteed by the master, and no food is supplied when there is no work to be done. The result is that the master takes the *kamia's* labour at the sweated wage for most of the year, but at a time when there is no agricultural work to be done and the *kamia* has least chance of getting any daily employment elsewhere, he is left to shift for himself as best he can. He is even free to get work wherever he can, but cannot leave his village for any time in search of it, for fear that he might abscond. Actually, he is reduced to earning the most miserable existence by collecting fuel and grass for sale. The restriction on his movement renders the *kamia* nothing better than a slave. An absconding *kamia* is unable to find any asylum in any part of the area where the system is prevalent. The sale and purchase of *kamias* is by no means uncommon in the north-west of the district. The price is the amount of *kamia's* debt.....

"The second example of the economic servitude is taken from the small industries where artisans in certain trades work for life for capitalists to whom they are indebted. The capitalist advances raw material, lends money for food and receives the manufactured article for sale. The debt is practically irredeemable and the artisan is transferred from capitalist to capitalist in a manner which practically amounts to sale and purchase. He has thus no incentive to increase his skill or efficiency, as any increased earnings are merely set off against his debt.

The examples we have given illustrate the worst effects of unchecked money power. In both instances, the most serious

factor is the hereditary element and the consequent state of helplessness to which the poor classes are reduced when burdened with a load of hereditary debt far beyond their power to redeem."

After recognizing 'the rural insolvency', the Report makes the following recommendation:—

"Turning now to the future, we have no hesitation in recording our belief that the greatest hope for the salvation of the rural masses from their crushing burden of debt rests in the growth and spread of a healthy and well-organised co-operative movement based upon the careful education and systematic training of the villagers themselves. Co-operation will be dealt with at length (at a later stage) ; but here we should state our view, that apart altogether from the question of debt, co-operative credit provides the only satisfactory means of financing agriculture on sound lines. Thrift must be encouraged by every legitimate means, for the savings resulting from the thrift of the cultivating classes form the best basis of the capital they require. If the rural community is to be contented, happy and prosperous, local governments must regard the co-operative movement as deserving all the encouragement which it lies within their power to give."

Those who have followed the growth of the co-operative movement in various parts of the country, know fully well its dismal failure.

While the catastrophe, in the rural area is growing at a staggering rate, when the volume of debt has reached unheard of figures, when the agrarian crisis has reduced the meagre income of the peasant to a still lower level, when the rate of peasant insolvency has been such as to convert peasant proprietors into landless labourers or paupers, in fact when the disastrous tide of the economic ruin of the peasant masses is raising with such fatal fury, how can the feeble dam of co-operative movement prove effective ?

The co-operative movement cannot touch the fringe of the problem, cannot tackle an iota of titanic agrarian crisis.

The income of the peasant is steadily diminishing due to the numerous factors mentioned already viz. the decline in

prices of his product in the world market, due to the raging agrarian crisis, the growing burdens of rents and taxes (direct or indirect), the steadily diminishing returns from land as a result of the exhaustion of bullocks which he cannot feed and deterioration of implements which he cannot renew, the progressive shrinking of the landholding (a result of overpressure on agriculture).

Not only that the peasant is unable to pay the debts of the moneylender or usurious interest due to him but it is economically impossible for him even to pay the restricted rate of interest demanded by the Co-operative Banks.

In fact, due to the rigid enforcement of its claims, wherever the Co-operatives had dealings with the agriculturists, they have been unpopular instead of being hailed as economic saviours of the agriculturists as the authors of the recommendations expected.

In fact, due to the rigid technique of collection of its claims, these societies are hated more among the rural masses than even the hated moneylender.

In Zamindari tracts, the Government has advised the Zamindars, the parasitic exploiters of millions of tenants, to take more active interest in their estates, to reduce the burdens of the tenants, to modernize i.e. mechanize agricultural methods, to introduce tractors, threshers, harvesters.

In fact, the economic advice given to the Zamindars by various Governors and Viceroyes seeks to transform them from conservative, passive, semi-feudal landlords, into active, enterprising modern capitalist landlords.

The Imperialist representatives knowing full well the fatal consequences of the present state of things point out also to the Zamindars the growing dangers of militant peasant movement if they did not reorganize in time and pacify them.

But the parasitism of the Zamindars is so deeply ingrained and the paralysis of all progressive impulses so complete among them that they remain impervious to the counsel of Imperialist Statesmen. In fact, in spite of the hammer blows of the agrarian crisis on the agriculturists, the Zamindars in U.P., Bengal and other Zamindari tracts, have not only not reduced the bur-



dens on their tenants but, to meet their demands, their luxury-bound existence, have increased them in a variety of ways.

This has only driven the tenants more into the clutches of the *shahukar*.

Other programmes of the Government for solving the problem of poverty and indebtedness of the rural population and also that of a collapsing agriculture, such as Irrigation Schemes, partial reduction of Land Revenue and other agrarian relief measures, adopted by governments, Congress and non-Congress, in various provinces, have proved futile. The aid given under these is too insignificant for overcoming the gigantic crisis.

The debts are too colossal and demand their complete wiping out. The Co-operative Movement or small relief in land, cannot solve the problem.

Arising out of the poverty of the agriculturist, his indebtedness is now one of the main causes of accentuating his poverty. Unable to pay his debt and even interest on it, the agriculturist not only loses his crops to the *sahukar* but is rapidly losing his land, becoming a pauper or a land-labourer.

Another feature of this state of things is that even if a measure of the Government or the humanitarians brings some insignificant economic advance to some agriculturist, in the conditions as he is placed, he cannot benefit by it. The moneylender or landlord, in lieu of his claims which the agriculturist is never able to completely meet, pounces upon the gain and seizes it. Thus slight improvement in his condition through any reformist measure, benefits only the landlord or moneylender whose bond slave the agriculturist is.

### THE WAY OUT

There is no reformist solution possible of the debacle in the rural area.

The problem of preventing the further decline of agrarian productive forces and building a powerful prosperous agricultural and general rural economy, of liquidating poverty, misery and indebtedness of the rural population, cannot be solved within the framework of the socio-economic relations

"the totality of which constitute the economic structure" of contemporary Indian Society.

The judicial term for the totality of these economic relations is the form of property relations. The agrarian problem cannot be solved without striking at the present forms of property relations in the countryside.

Whether this agrarian Revolution is carried out from above (by the State) or from below (by the masses) is not so fundamental a question as the one that no solution of the agrarian situation is possible *without* disturbing the entire system of Zamindari and usury Capital.

All feudal property and landlord's property and usury capital require to be wiped out. These are the pre-conditions for creating a progressive and prosperous countryside.

The negative task consisting in overcoming the obstacles for reorganizing on a higher material and cultural level the whole social existence in the rural area. This task consists in freeing the rural population from the shackles of usury Capital, landlordism etc.

All debts must be cancelled. Zamindari must be abolished. The land revenue claim of the State must be appreciably brought down.

After a modest deduction, the agriculturist must be permitted to retain all the products which he produces by the sweat of his toil.

All mortgage deeds and landsale deeds, all property rights of non-toiling 'agriculturists' (Zamindars) in land, all debt claims should be rescinded.

A new starting point must be created for organizing the entire life in the rural area. Without debts, without landlords, with the burden of excessive land revenue reduced.

But this is not sufficient. This will create the negative premise for successfully realizing the positive task of building a happy, joyous material and cultural life in the villages.

The positive task consists in developing productive forces in the countryside, in raising the productivity of human labour

in agriculture, in relieving the present "overpressure on agriculture."

The rapid expansion of Indian industry is indispensable to incorporate surplus rural population and relieve the overpressure. This, of course, comes in clash with the interests of the British Industries and till the Indian people have not secured political freedom there is no prospect of real and extensive industrial development of India since the Government of British Capitalism in India will continue to thwart any, development in that direction.

Without political freedom, industrial development of India on a scale as to solve the problem of "overpressure on agriculture" is not possible. Without the solution of this basic rural problem, it is not possible to revive and strengthen agriculture. So the whole problem of recuperation of Indian agriculture and general rural economy is elevated from the economic to the political plane. *It raises the issue of political power.*

If agriculture has to be restored, if the present poverty of the masses has to be eliminated, not only should the masses be freed from all burdens of the Zamindars and moneylenders but also the present small holdings of agriculturists must go. The ruinous process of land fragmentation whereby the acreage of land for individual cultivator progressively diminishes, must end. This is possible only if industrial outlet is provided for millions of rural population who look to land for maintenance.

But this is not enough. The Indian agriculturist must be able to raise the productivity of his labour by modernizing the methods and technique of agricultural production. Mere freedom from the moneylender's clutches or the Zamindar's grip or even more land at his disposal for the purposes of tillage is not enough. He would need modern implements, scientific manures, efficient seeds, sturdy bullocks.

To be able to compete with formidable international capitalist agrarian trusts, the agriculturist—now free from the strangling pressures of landlord's and usurer's dues—must reconstruct on higher technical basis the agricultural process. The cost of production has to be reduced here too.

But when power and productive forces—land, raw materials, industrial data, transport etc.,—are in the hands of the people as in a free India and not in the hands of Imperialists or a few capitalists and landlords, conditions for further economic development of the country are created. Not only exploitation of toilers by exploiters has now ceased, but the economic initiative as to how to dispose of the existing productive forces has passed from the minority of exploiters to the toiling people. Not only do the people now retain the products of their soil which formerly were seized by the exploiters, but the freedom to reorganize and develop the productive forces is achieved by the people.

By eliminating the property rights in land, industry etc., of a few Zamindars, usurers and capitalists, the check on the further growth of productive forces is removed. Not only is the wealth created by the toiling people now kept and used by themselves but also the condition for increasing that wealth by proper disposition of forces is created.

The economic initiative\* passes from the exploiters to the toilers. Control over the means and conditions of production by the toiling people results in the proper use and growth of these means.

There is no solution of the agrarian problem within the present Imperialist-Landlord-Moneylender System.

Imperialism which is economically waning, cannot relax its burdens on Colonial peasantry. In fact, it requires to enhance them to maintain its international position. All Government programmes of agrarian relief such as revenue remission or reduction are temporary and affect a microscopic minority. Their extremely insignificant value is further neutralized by the growth in indirect taxation, on articles of necessities or by financial manipulations. Imperialism cannot undertake big irrigation schemes since either it lacks enough capital or investment in irrigation enterprise is not profitable. The co-operative cannot alleviate the debt misery of the agriculturist because his income is so meagre, that he cannot pay any interest at all. Government cannot reduce land-revenue because the State machinery of colonial rule has to be kept in

efficient order. The agriculturist is further too poor, nay too indebted, to purchase a pair of sturdy bullocks in which the Viceroy sees the real saviour of the agriculturist. All agricultural wisdom distilled into the ears of the peasant by means of Government installed radios in the villages is of no avail since the debt saddled peasant lacks the economic wherewithal to put into practice the suggestions. The ignorance of well-meaning humanitarians regarding the real causes of poverty of the peasantry, their attributing it mainly to lack of education on the part of the peasantry, makes them concentrate on irrelevant programmes. It is finally the economic helplessness and desperateness of the farmer which explains why he drinks or does not feel enthusiastic and has no means to remain clean and all that. This ignorance of the educated humanitarians is more shocking than the ignorance of the illiterate masses.

Zamindars cannot relax their grip over the tenants. To do so they must give up their parasitic existence i.e., they must cease to be Zamindars.

Nor can British Imperialism abolish Zamindars and liberate the peasants. First, for the political reason that the Zamindars are the social support of British Rule in India. Secondly, for the economic reason that the downfall of Zamindars will economically involve British Finance—Capital, since there are strong economic ties between Zamindars and British Banks. In fact the surplus wealth of the Zamindars, wrung out from their tenants form a good portion of the Capital of British Banks.

Finally the Shahukar will be least willing to abandon his debt claims. He will be going against his age-long tradition if he did so.

#### FINAL REMARKS

So it is necessary to remove the obstacle in the form of the present social relations of production before the agrarian problem is solved.

Within the system of these relations, the outlook, both for agriculture and the agriculturist, is dismal. As we have said, the agriculturist realizes progressively less for his crops, due to



the fall in prices of agrarian products (the effect of the world agrarian crisis). His income is diminishing while the burdens on him—land-revenue, indirect and other taxes, moneylender's interest, Zamindar's rent—are increasing.

In fact, the agriculturist is unable to maintain the agricultural process on the level even of simple reproduction.

The results: Soil is deteriorating. Its fertility is declining. Live-stock is losing its working capacity. The peasant family suffering from greater and greater want is losing in physical energy—all leading to greater and greater decay of agriculture and pauperization of the agriculturist.

And all this, as we have said at the outset, in spite of the fact that all conditions for a prosperous agriculture exist in our country.

There is warm and varied climate congenial for rich and diverse agricultural crops. There are subterranean stores of unextracted or insufficiently extracted mineral wealth such as iron, coal, etc., for building up powerful and extensive light and heavy industries which can engage millions of our people in industrial activity, thereby relieving strain on agriculture and providing advanced technical means for agriculture, such as tractors, harvestors etc. There are mighty rivers descending from high altitudes on plains, whose volumes of water flowing with great velocities wait to be canalized and utilized for generating enormous electric power, which may motivate our industries, agriculture etc. And above all, there is a huge hard-working population whose living labour can change the very face of our land.

Still misery, poverty, decay, are rampant in the rural area to-day.

We have already enumerated the obstacles to the full utilizing of these forces and resources of our land and realizing of our dream of a prosperous and progressive countryside. These obstacles have to be removed if the dream has to be realized.

British Capitalism has converted India into its colony. Our national economy is essentially a colonial economy

producing for the needs of foreign Capitalism. This subservience obstructs and limits all our economic development.

Our agriculture should cease to produce commercial crops to meet the demands of British Capitalist Industries as it is to-day. Further, under the present feudal-Imperialist-landlord conditions about one third of land remains uncultivated. When the economic life is planned and in the interest of the working population, the present cultivated area can be reinforced by the reclaimed land.

Imperialism obstructs our industrial development to-day in the interests of Imperialist home industries. Without considerable industrial development, the agrarian problem cannot be solved. Since overpressure on land is one of the basic causes of the rural tragedy, therefore, it is absolutely necessary that the Imperialist check on our industrial growth must go.

Landlordism and feudalism which not only drain the wealth of the country without any productive return but also stand in the way of any agricultural improvement, must also go.

Without the removal of these main handicaps on our economic life, not only no further economic development is possible but also the present level of agriculture cannot be maintained.

Political freedom for a free economic disposal of all natural, human and technical resources of our land is the precondition for the revival of our agriculture, for the unhampered growth of our industries, for a steady, general economic advance.

The dream of a progressive and prosperous countryside is bound up with the programme of political freedom, the basic condition for abolishing the present relations of production, for commanding for the working population land and other resources of the country, for building a planned economic life for our people, for Socialism.

## *The Problem of Rural Indebtedness Since 1939*

### I

#### SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENTS AFTER 1939

Chapter 6 of this study, as indicated in the Footnote on page 81, was published as a separate pamphlet in 1939. The present chapter is added to continue the analysis of the same problem as it has been unfolding during the last two decades.

The two decades after 1939 have been momentous in the history of Indian society. Four major events of crucial significance have occurred during these twenty years.

(1) India was dragged into the Second World War by the British Rulers without the consent of the people. The War-period was marked by many developments. One of the effects of War, according to some thinkers, was very significant. The War created a favourable situation for larger production and higher prices for both agricultural and other commodities, and thus eliminated that climate of depression and crisis which had loomed large over the Indian economy during twenties and thirties.

(2) The growing resistance movements of the people of India against the British Rule climaxing into August Struggle of 1942 and thereby electrifying the political awakening among the people was another significant event during this period.

(3) The recrudescence of bitter communal strife after 1943, as a result of scramble for concessions and sharing of power between the Indian National Congress and the Muslim

League of India, culminating into the Partition of India was the third momentous event that shook the basis of the Indian society.

(4) The withdrawal of British Rulers after transferring power to the Indian National Congress in the Indian Union and to the Muslim League in Pakistan was the fourth significant event that shaped the life of the Indian people.

After the advent of Independence, the Government of the Indian Union, formed by the Indian National Congress, launched a vigorous programme of socio-economic reorganization of the Indian society on the basis of the postulates of a mixed economy as formulated in the two Industrial Policy Resolutions and executed through the instrumentality of various Five-Year Plans.

On the background of these developments, the Indian society including its agrarian sector has been experiencing many changes. We have reviewed in other Papers the impact of the Government measures on the life of the rural people.

We will assess in this Paper, the effects of these developments on the indebtedness of the rural people.

#### CONTROVERSY REGARDING THE LEVEL OF RURAL INDEBTEDNESS

A great controversy has been raging among experts over the effects of these developments on rural indebtedness in India.

One group of scholars and experts believe that these developments have reduced the importance and gravity of the problem of rural debt. According to them, during the War and post-War period, the Indian economy has freed itself from its stagnant state. There has taken place significant rise in the volume of production, and also in the prices of commodities, which brought about marked redistribution of the national income from urban to rural areas. This resultant agricultural prosperity proved highly beneficial to the cultivating classes leading to the reduction of their debt burden. Thus according to this group of thinkers, the problem of rural indebtedness is no longer a problem to-day.

Another group of experts—Professor Wadia and Professor Merchant being outstanding among them—have made very

pungent observations on the above-mentioned version of the problem of indebtedness. According to them, "there seems to be a widespread belief sedulously propagated by the big business that the rise in prices, specifically of agricultural commodities during the War and post-War period, has led to shift in the distribution of national income from urban to rural areas through agricultural prosperity, and that this has largely benefited the cultivating classes. Accordingly, we are told that there is no debt problem at all to-day. This belief has been so widespread that the Planning Commission in their First Five-Year Plan do not make any reference whatsoever to the problem as if it were non-existent.....No reliable data are available regarding this so-called agricultural prosperity."<sup>1</sup>

#### CONFUSING MASS OF CONTRADICTIONARY DATA

One of the major difficulties which confronts a student who wants to make an objective study of any social phenomenon in India is the confusing mass of contradictory data. In spite of massive data collected by Expert Committees and Commissions, one fails to arrive at a solid core of non-controversial facts on which one can rely. This inability on the part of the authorities concerned to provide reliable data is explained on a number of grounds such as :

- (1) recency of data collection on a scientific basis ;
- (2) complexity, massiveness and heterogeneity of data ;
- (3) quick collection of data required for rapid decisions on the background of fast-changing situations ;
- (4) segmental nature of data collection and researches ;
- (5) data predominantly collected for policy exigencies rather than for scientific research ;
- (6) non-tabulation of massive data which after being collected, are not classified or published for one reason or other ;
- (7) difficulties of collecting data in a setting where people suffer from illiteracy, ignorance, superstition, customary indifference to record-keeping or suspicion towards all who demand information.



## MAJOR STUDIES ON RURAL INDEBTEDNESS

Taking into consideration all these difficulties, one still wonders whether a solid core of essential information could not have been collected. We will not, however, examine the causes of this inability. We will, at present, try to locate the trend of indebtedness from the data available to us howsoever contradictory they may appear.

The following investigations into the problem help us to get an idea of the trend of rural indebtedness during the last two decades :

(1) Dr. B. V. Narayanswamy Naidu's enquiry into rural indebtedness in Madras which was published under the title "Report of the Economist for Enquiry into Rural Indebtedness" (Government Press, Madras, 1946) is one of the major studies which throws light on the problem during the War Period.

(2) Survey and Re-Survey of 258 selected villages in Mysore in 1941 and 1945 provides another source of the information regarding the problem.

(3) Famine Enquiry Commission in its final report arrives at some conclusions regarding the trend of Indebtedness during the War-period.

(4) Rural Banking Enquiry Committee's Report also provides material to understand the problem of agrarian indebtedness.

(5) Dr. G. D. Agarwal's study of 1088 families in fourteen villages in U. P., Dr. C. H. Shah's enquiry into the impact of War on agriculture, investigation conducted in Karnatak and Deccan regions in the Bombay State and similar individual studies organized in different parts of the country also provide material to estimate the trend of rural indebtedness in India.

(6) Numerous Reports of the various Enquiry Committees and Commissions appointed by the Government also provide material for such study. The two Reports of the Agricultural Labour Enquiry Committees based on their investigation and re-investigation in 1951-52 and 1956-57

respectively provide valuable material on rural indebtedness and more particularly indebtedness of the agricultural labourers.

(7) However, the most comprehensive material is available in the Survey and the Follow-up Survey conducted by the Reserve Bank of India in 1951 and 1956-57. The Survey was conducted under the direction of the Committee, composed of Sjt. A. D. Gorwala (Chairman), Professor D. R. Gadgil, Shri B. Venkatappiah and Dr. N. S. R. Sastry (Member-Secretary) appointed by the Reserve Bank of India in 1951. Its object was to study the credit situation in rural areas of the entire country. It conducted the field enquiry enveloping 1,30,000 families in 600 villages in 75 selected districts throughout the country. Several volumes have been published recording the findings of this enquiry. A Follow-up Survey (1956-57) was also conducted by the Reserve Bank. The Report was published in 1960. The Survey and the Follow-up Survey Reports provide the most focussed, most comprehensive and many-sided picture of the rural indebtedness.

### TWO SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT

What light do these studies throw on the problem of rural indebtedness? There are two schools of thought with regard to assessing the trend of rural indebtedness after 1939. One school of thought is represented by the experts who accept the findings of the study conducted by the Reserve Bank of India. Experts comprising another school of thought consider the findings of Rural Credit Survey Reports as under-estimation of the problem.

We will present the assessment of both these schools of thought regarding the trend of rural indebtedness since 1939 to arrive at a correct understanding of the situation.

#### ESTIMATE OF THE TREND OF RURAL INDEBTEDNESS BY ONE SCHOOL

The Rural Credit Survey Report Vol. I, Chapter 5, entitled "Trends in Indebtedness since 1929-30" assesses the trend of development in the following words :

"Three enquiries, one in Bombay, the other in Madras and the third in Mysore which assessed the effects of World War II on the indebtedness of agriculturists showed that the chief beneficiaries of the rise in prices of agricultural commodities during the War period were the more substantial cultivators. As the Mysore enquiry points out, the smaller cultivator may have been actually adversely affected in particular areas. However, it is clear that during the War period, there was no marked increase in the money burden of debt even on the smaller cultivators. At the same time the real burden of past debt was reduced to a great extent as a result of the changed value of money. Further, simultaneously, for all classes of cultivators, debt accounts, which appeared to have been immobile burdens during the period of the depression and the years following till the War, probably became more active. The evidence for this is partly contained in the data of the Rural Credit Survey. For the sample of families included in the intensive enquiry, outstanding debt was recorded in terms of years for which the debt has been outstanding. From the analysis of these data it appears that barring the Punjab-PEPSU region, the outstanding debt of cultivators to the extent of 80 per cent or more was of a standing of five years or less. Further, borrowings for repayment of old debts constituted only a small proportion of total borrowing during the year of Survey. All of this, even when allowance is made for certain limitations of these data, indicate that the debt accounts during the War-period had become more active for all classes of cultivators.

"Indebtedness in the period immediately after the War appears to have showed a tendency towards an increase. Subsequently also the trend appears to have been in the upward direction. It is, however, important to note that none of the post-War enquiries revealed a level of debt as high as that revealed by the Rural Credit Survey.... The proportion of increase in debt, however, needs to be carefully interpreted. All debt contracts for current purposes in the post-War period would be at steadily higher levels with the continuing increase in prices. After the burden of past debts had been materially lessened — and this appears to have happened by about

1945-46 — any debt survey would show debts being contracted at higher and higher levels though this would be no necessary indication of an increased burden of debt.

"The trend in indebtedness in the year 1945-52 is not fully known for lack of appropriate data. It would, however, appear that towards the latter half of the War-period, roughly about 1943-44 and upto 1946-47, costs were catching up with prices and there was an evidence of stabilization of position which meant no further rapid decrease in debt for all and perhaps an increase in debt for some. This stabilization was disturbed by the large spurt of prices after decontrol and the agriculturist had another time in which he could improve his financial position. This was followed by another brief period of comparative stability till the Korean War boom of 1950-51. The year of the Survey first saw, in a period of over ten years, a sharp decline in agricultural prices and it also probably recorded on that account a higher increase in indebtedness than in any previous year for a long time past.

The proportion of mortgage debt to total debt as obtained in the Rural Survey was lower than that estimated by the Provincial Banking Enquiry Committees. This would broadly indicate that there was probably a marked decline in the proportion of mortgage to total debt in the country in the period between the two enquiries."<sup>2</sup>

#### ESTIMATE OF THE SECOND SCHOOL

The other group of experts consider this estimate as understatement of the problem. We will present their assessment of the problem which is most succinctly formulated in the following statement :

"It is difficult to arrive at an estimate of total all-India debt on the basis of the Madras Enquiry of Dr. Naidu in view of the different conditions prevailing in different States. But if the same proportion of debt in relation to population is applied for the whole of India, the total rural debt in 1945 would work out at Rs. 1,200 crores and making allowance for the loss of areas to Pakistan and ignoring differences in conditions of different States, the estimate for all-India would be

round about Rs. 1,100 crores. The First Report of the National Income Committee estimates the rural debt of Rs. 913 crores, of which about 83 per cent is non-productive, and only 5 per cent of which is supplied by co-operative societies. The interest on this debt is estimated at Rs. 86.5 crores. S. Thirumalai thinks it safe to assume that the debt position is at the same level as in 1937, recently Rs. 1,800 crores.

When we take note of the fact that the cost of cultivation and of living of the agriculturist have risen more than in proportion to the rise in agricultural prices, that the area under multiple crops in our country is very small, that the farmer is not self-sufficient in regard to food and other agricultural products, and that, as a result, the War-time boom instead of being a source of prosperity to the average cultivator has brought him into greater difficulties, further that the agricultural labourer could gain nothing by a rise in wages, except when paid in kind, we shall have to conclude that the debt has not been reduced. Finally, it is necessary to take note of the concentration of agricultural income in fewer hands. The Rural Banking Enquiry observes: A fairly large proportion of the total agricultural income has gone into the hands of this small minority (forming less than 20 per cent of the agriculturists) and the benefit of debt reduction has largely accrued to this class. Taking the lowest figure given by the National Income Committee, we would not be wrong in stating that in spite of the changes that have occurred in the last few years since the estimate made by the Central Banking Enquiry Committee in 1930, the rural debt position remains what it was twenty-five years back."<sup>3</sup>

The rural indebtedness is thus variously estimated. The range of variation is very wide. The Rural Credit Survey Report assesses the volume of debt as Rs. 750 crores. While Sjt. Thirumalai considers that the debt cannot be less than Rs. 1,800 crores. Professors Wadia and Merchant feel that the volume of debt would be the same as it was before two decades. It is difficult to arrive at any firm objective conclusion when experts differ so widely.



## BASIC ARGUMENTS OF THE FIRST SCHOOL

However, it would be instructive to understand the basic arguments put forward by both the schools of assessors. A critical sifting of the arguments may help us to arrive at some reasonable estimate of the extent of indebtedness.

Those who argue that the problem of rural indebtedness has become less acute during last two decades take their stand on the following grounds :

- (1) Rise of agricultural prices resulting in a relative agricultural prosperity leading to more income for the same amount of crops and therefore more money, less need for incurring debt and greater facilities to clear off debts ;
- (2) Impact of various government measures to scale down debt, to restrict interest, to regulate money-lenders' activities, and others adopted during this period is reducing the volume of debt ;
- (3) Impact of Partition in reducing the volume of debt in the Indian Union by opting a portion of indebted population to Pakistan. Indebtedness is also partitioned and therefore the net debt of the Indian Union less than the debt of all-India in 1939 ;
- (4) Impact of the depreciation of the value of money as a result of inflation and conscious devaluation of Rupee in automatically reducing the real value of indebtedness.

Those who assert that the debt problem is as acute as it was during the thirties present the following counter-acting arguments to substantiate their case :

- (1) The so-called agricultural prosperity is a myth. No reliable data have been marshalled to substantiate this myth. Professor C. N. Vakil, in a Foreword to a book entitled "Myth of Agricultural Prosperity" makes the following observation : "With small un-economic units of cultivation and a major dependence on the vagaries of monsoon, farming operation in our country is on such a subsistence level that the

average Indian farmer has comparatively small marketable surplus to realize large gains as a result of boom conditions in food prices." Sjt. Mavin-kurve in his work "Myth of Agricultural Prosperity" asserts that "the war-time profits filled mostly the pockets of the industrialists, the wholesale and retail trader, the middleman and the contractor, while agricultural classes suffered..... an actual diminution in their real income."

- (2) During the War and post-War Planning Period, agriculture is being more and more monetized, commercialized and enmeshed into the coils of market and money mechanism. As a result of the efforts to expand transport and means of communication in the country as well as due to the attempt to develop the national economy by means of Plans, through the programme of industrialization, commercialization and monetization of the economy, the country is becoming more and more enmeshed into the tentacles of the market mechanism. The peasants are being caught more and more into the orbit of operations of the market-machine. Agriculture, whatever crop it may produce, is becoming more a business with its calculations of costs and returns than a mode of subsistence. Farming has ceased to be a way of life but a ruthless competitive business which transforms farmers into competitors producing for profits and warring with one another, the more powerful and the more resourceful competitors weeding out the weaker rivals. The state of the market increasingly determines who will benefit. In fact, the condition of the market, the nature of opportunities and facilities provided within the market, will indicate who will succeed in the market. Even if the market provides equal opportunities and facilities to all the competitors, it is the law of competitive, profit-oriented economy that the weaker will go to the wall and the stronger will emerge triumphant. If the market-mechanism is defective, tilting in favour

of certain groups and operating as an area for unequal competitors, the weaker will be hit much harder and would be ruined at a very rapid rate.

The operations of the growing market-mechanism in India are very defective, defective from the point of view of weaker competitors. The operations as they grow tilt more and more in favour of stronger competitors.

Professor Alak Ghosh has indicated the following features of Agricultural Marketing in India as it prevails to-day :

- “(i) Substantial portion of agricultural produce is sold by the agriculturists in the villages at a low price and not to the organized markets ; this happens due to the preponderance of middlemen, who travel from village to village buying and collecting the produce ; in some cases, the cultivator is so heavily indebted to the village money-lender-cum-trader that he has no alternative but to surrender the bulk of his produce to him at nominal prices ;
- (ii) difference in the quality of the products also stand in the way of direct sale in organized markets. . . . ;
- (iii) inadequate transport and communication facilities are responsible for sales in the villages at low prices ;
- (iv) lack of cold storage facilities and of proper agencies for imparting information about market prices explain why the sale of produce takes place at unusually low prices ;
- (v) A few cultivators, who are successful in escaping from the clutches of the middlemen and take their produce to the organized markets, are also duped and cheated by fraudulent practices in organized markets ; instead of standard weights, there is a multiplicity of weights and measures which are utterly confusing to illiterate peasants ;
- (vi) inadequate ware-housing facilities also force the cultivators to sell their produce just after the harvest when prices are usually low.”<sup>4</sup>

Within the matrix of this market situation, both depression and rise of prices affect adversely the large majority of farmers who are marginal and sub-marginal cultivators. Even the rise of prices works adversely in two ways. As a seller of his commodities, the small cultivator does not get the benefit of higher prices because he is already in the grip of the moneylender, the trader or the middleman who exploits the above-mentioned market situation and who purchases from him very cheaply. Further, as a purchaser this marginal and sub-marginal cultivator has to buy both agricultural and other goods required by him at a higher price for running his little uneconomic farm-business and for his own subsistence. Lacking an alternative occupation, the farmer has to stick to his occupation which, due to higher cost of factors of production, is becoming more and more uneconomic for him. Thus, the small farmers even suffer during the periods of high prices. If this be the case, how could these small farmers decrease their debt or abstain from incurring further debts?

The critics of the first group of experts also advance empirical evidence to show that the problem of rural indebtedness could not have become less acute during last two decades. According to them, every empirical intensive small-scale enquiry which probes into the impact of the rise of agricultural prices on different strata of rural population proves that rise of prices affect beneficially only substantial farmers and harmfully the marginal and sub-marginal cultivators. Even Rural Credit Survey and Re-survey Reports do not contradict the basic truth of this trend.

The critics of the optimistic school of experts ask, if this be the truth, how could the debt of marginal and sub-marginal producers be reduced during these two decades? Further they argue that the debt incurred by these cultivators is mostly for paying interest on debts, for reducing corpus of the old debt, for unproductive consumption purposes and to meet the constant deficit from their uneconomically operating tiny holdings. If this be the case, how can these farmers reduce the debt in a setting where both cost of production and cost of consumption are mounting up?



In short, the arguments of those who believe that the debt problem of the small agriculturists has remained the same, if not worsened, is based on the assumptions that the conditions and forces which were responsible for generating debt have remained the same during last two decades and therefore the problem of rural indebtedness has not still become less acute.

The controversy still continues among the experts regarding the extent of rural indebtedness in India.

#### FOUR MAJOR STUDIES

With a view to arriving at an objective judgment on this problem, we will review the findings of four major explorations on the subject.

These four studies are as follows:—

(i) The findings of Rural Credit Survey Reports conducted in 1951;

(ii) The findings of Rural Credit Follow-up Survey Report published in 1960 and analysing the data of 1956-57;

(iii) The assessment of the changes that have taken place in the countryside in the conditions of cultivating classes as revealed in two Reports of the Agricultural Labour Enquiry Committees, 1951, 1958, and finally;

(iv) The review of the impact of the moneylending and other legislations on the problem of indebtedness of the rural people.

#### BASIC CRITERIA TO ANALYSE THE PROBLEM

We will examine the findings of these major studies from the following angle:

- (1) The conditions which force the cultivators to incur debt;
- (2) the nature of debt and its impact on different strata of cultivators;
- (3) the effect of the measures adopted by the Government to counteract the ravages of the extant private agencies which provide loans to cultivators.



A correct analysis of the problem of indebtedness will help us to arrive at some conclusions with regard to the future of this problem. It will also give us an idea of the real factors which still persist in perpetuating the problem. As some experts have pointed out, the real danger of rural indebtedness is not due to the amount of indebtedness but the conditions which compel cultivators to borrow, the purposes for which cultivators borrow, and the social impact of these conditions and purposes of borrowing in economically strengthening certain strata and classes in the agrarian society at the cost of other strata and classes.

We may assume for the purpose of argument that the volume of debt had somehow or other decreased to Rs. 750 crores in 1951 as asserted by the most optimistic evaluators. However, does this assumption help us to arrive at the conclusion that the debt problem has now ceased to be a major problem? Have the causes which led to the alarming trend of rising indebtedness during twenties and thirties been counteracted by favourable economic forces and positive measures adopted by the Government and other agencies during the War and Post-War two decades? What are the currents and tendencies revealed by the above-mentioned explorations?

#### FEATURES HIGHLIGHTED BY R.C. SURVEY REPORT

We will begin our review by locating the chief features of the nature of indebtedness as unfolded by the Rural Credit Survey Report.

The central features highlighted by the Survey are as follows:

(i) The miserable performance of institutional agencies in providing rural finance. The Government provide 3.4 per cent; the much talked off co-operatives, 3 per cent; and the Commercial Banks 1 per cent of the total amount of the credit. The private individual credit agencies such as moneylenders, traders, relatives and landlords, provided about 93 per cent of the total amount of the rural credit. Moneylenders alone provided 70 per cent of the total amount of borrowed fund.

This feature of the provision of finance has grave social implications:

(a) It indicates the grip of private creditors and more particularly of the moneylender-cum-trader on the life of the rural people. When studied in the background of caste, religion and nationality of the moneylender creditor and peasant debtor it acquires new social significance. It reveals the monopoly of economic and resultant social and other power in the hands of certain castes and communities.

(b) It also indicates the problem of future resistance and the wily techniques which this creditor class would adopt to circumvent all measures to curb their power.

(c) It also provides us with an insight into the social, political and cultural means which will be adopted by this group and various sections comprising this group to counteract all efforts by rival credit-supplying agencies and by their debt-victims to cripple their power or achieve freedom from their tentacles.

(d) It demonstrates the utter failure of Co-operatives as an alternative financial machinery to provide credit to the cultivating class. The massive panegyrics of the supposed beneficent role of co-operation and the co-operatives when visualised in the context of the actual reality appears more as sophistry almost hiding the major issues and the real solutions of the problem.

(e) It also shows that the institutional credit bodies will have to take a gigantic stride before they can provide an effective alternative to the moneylender and the trader as the financier of the cultivators. Can the Government wedded to the postulates of mixed economy and profit-oriented production for market, the co-operatives operating to function within the same socio-economic framework, or the commercial banks operating within the same matrix, meet the challenge of the moneylender-cum-trader? Can they establish an elaborate alternative financial machinery to provide the money required by various categories of cultivators for various short and long-term purposes?

This brings us to the second and third features of the problem of debt as revealed by the Rural Credit Survey.

(2) The second startling finding of the Survey was that the bulk of loans from the co-operatives went to the big cultivators who constituted 10 per cent of the total cultivators, while the medium and small cultivators who constituted about 70 per cent of the total cultivators in the country received only a negligible fraction of the financial amount. We will draw inferences from this phenomenon subsequently.

(3) The third finding of the Survey discloses the nature of purposes for which debt is incurred by the cultivators. The following figures reveal the purposes of Borrowing:

<i>Purpose of Borrowing :</i>	<i>Percentage of Total</i>
Capital Expenditure on Farm	27.8
Current Expenditure on Farm	9.3
Non-Farm Business Expenditure	6.6
Family Expenditure	50.2
Other Expenditure	5.7
More than one purpose	0.4
<hr/>	
Total	100.0

Further the findings of Rural Credit Survey Report point out that a large proportion of borrowing for productive purposes is done by big and large cultivators, while the overwhelming portion of borrowing for consumption purposes is done by middle and small farmers.

#### SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

What are the implications of these findings? They are as follows :

(a) In the context of the production which is increasingly being tied to the apron-strings of profit-oriented, competitive market economy, a small group of substantial farmers are strengthening their competitive power at the cost of weaker marginal and sub-marginal cultivators.

(b) The marginal and sub-marginal farmers constituting about 70 per cent of the total cultivating class are forced to borrow very largely for consumption i.e. for unproductive

purposes. Their borrowing is of such a nature that it functions as disinvestment in production. Further, it is of a nature which is likely to accelerate the volume of debt, because the borrower is not in a position to repay it from his deficit production. The borrowing for consumption purposes by the medium and small cultivators also point to another alarming feature of our agricultural economy. The agrarian profession for the vast majority of cultivators has become a deficit, non-remunerative and losing venture. The majority of the medium and small farmers cling to this profession because there is no alternative occupation. With the passage of time, they will become less fit in competition, would sink deeper and deeper into debt, and would be either transformed into agricultural labourers, bound-slaves of the creditors by backdoor (if not permitted legally), or paupers without wherewithal resorting to all sorts of crimes for their mere survival.

4. The Rural Credit Survey Report reveals that about 50 per cent of the cultivating families surveyed were willing to offer as security for their loan their immovable property. Of the rest, 25 per cent were ready to offer personal security, and the remaining farmer families could not specify the type of security they could give. Thus 50 per cent of the agriculturists have hardly anything to offer as security. The value of the personal security of a person without means in a competitive profit-oriented social order is not only negligible but almost next to nothing. Thus barring big and large cultivators, the 70 per cent of the marginal and sub-marginal cultivators are not merely ceasing to be credit-worthy but are being thrown out from the orbit of remunerative life with nothing to fall back upon and with nobody to assure them some aid.

5. The fifth feature of rural indebtedness as revealed by the Rural Credit Survey is that the village average of outstanding debt per family varied from Rs. 29 to Rs. 1200. The average borrowing of a cultivated family during 1951-52 was Rs. 210.

#### FINDINGS OF R.C. FOLLOW-UP SURVEY REPORT

What changes have taken place during last decade after the First Survey was undertaken? We will review the



findings of Rural Credit Follow-up Survey undertaken in 1956-57 and published in the year 1960.

We will report their findings in connection with the debt position of big cultivators, large cultivators, medium cultivators and small cultivators, who constitute 10, 20, 40, 30 percent respectively of the total cultivating population. The strata-wise findings about the rural indebtedness are as follows:

(1) "Big and large cultivators accounted for a larger proportion of area of cultivated holdings than of outstanding debts ...."<sup>5</sup>

(2) "In most districts...the debt per acre of cultivated holdings was substantially higher among medium and small cultivators than among big and large cultivators".<sup>6</sup>

(3) "The data .... show that the value of recorded assets declined with the decline in the size of the holdings. The pre-eminent position of big cultivators is fully brought out by this data. The average value of assets among them was substantially higher than that even among higher cultivators.

... "The measures of the burden of debt considered in this chapter indicate that medium and small cultivators were worse off than big and large cultivators, the burden was clearly heavier on small cultivators. It is, however, of interest to note that the difference in position between medium and small cultivators, indicated by the data, relating to outstanding debt in relation to value of recorded assets, was less marked than that indicated by the data on outstanding debt in relation to owned land. This ... in turn points to the relatively lower importance of land as a source of livelihood among small cultivators."<sup>7</sup>

(4) "Generally, the debt outstanding on loans contracted for agricultural purposes accounted for a large proportion of total debt among big and large cultivators than among medium and small cultivators. In most districts the proportion of debt against consumption was markedly higher among medium and small cultivators in particular the latter group, than among big and large cultivators. The data on classification of debt according to purpose-wise duration reveal two important features..."<sup>8</sup>

•



(a) "They show that in the low monetized subsistence type economies...among every class of cultivators, the major part of the total debt was outstanding on loan contracted for consumption purposes ... In sharp contrast was the situation among big and large cultivators in the districts with the relatively developed economies .... Among the relatively developed districts medium and small cultivators reported a higher proportion of debt outstanding on loans borrowed for consumption purposes."<sup>9</sup>

(b) "The second feature of significance shown by the data is the increasing importance of consumption purposes with the decline in the size of cultivated holdings. This feature was particularly marked in the relatively developed districts."<sup>10</sup>

(5) "The proportion of debt bearing high rates of interests was relatively higher and the proportion of debt bearing low rates of interest or no interest at all was relatively lower, among cultivators in lower classes."<sup>11</sup>

(6) "The data on the dues receivable show that in every district there was a section of the cultivating community which had advanced substantial amount to others, generally other members of the cultivating community. Both the proportion of families reporting dues receivable and the amount of dues receivable per reporting family were higher among big and large cultivators than among other classes of cultivators. If the allowance is made for dues receivable in the data of outstanding debt, the burden of debt on big and large cultivators will be found to be considerably lower than that indicated in Section 27."<sup>12</sup>

(7) "It was mainly among big and large cultivators that any substantial net investment took place. Medium and small cultivators generally recorded disinvestment in the districts."<sup>13</sup>

(8) "In almost all selected districts, ... the proportion of debt owed to the government to the total debt owed to all agencies was relatively higher in the case of big cultivators."<sup>14</sup>

The above findings of the Follow-up Survey Report only prove that the major trends of rural indebtedness and their social consequences persist even now.

THE FINDINGS OF SECOND AGRICULTURAL LABOUR INQUIRY  
CONDUCTED IN 1956-57

Before we draw the major social implications of these findings, we will record the findings of still another Report which has recently come out. The Report of the Second Agricultural Labour Inquiry (1956-57), a sort of a follow-up Report to that of the earlier Agricultural Labour Inquiry in 1951-52, throws valuable light on the trends of both Agrarian developments after 1951 and also on the trends of Agrarian Indebtedness in India. The findings are extremely significant and deserve fullest publicity as they raise the most crucial problems of agrarian social structure in India.

Shri B. G. Verghese has summarized the findings of that Report in an article "Plans and Perspective—Agricultural Labour" in the *Times of India*. We have to rely on the summary because unfortunately the Report after being released for a limited group has become non-available to the public.

We will quote Shri Verghese *in extenso* as the findings are crucial and deserve careful study.

"The Report relates to the first year of the Second Plan. But the data contained in it is the latest available and when read together with the findings of the first Agricultural Labour enquiry, 1951-52, reveal a dismal trend which is not likely to have been radically affected during the Second Plan period. The findings, in short, reveal a decline in the status and well-being of agricultural labour in India which comprises about 72 million of the country's population . . . The main changes recorded between 1950-51 and 1956-57 are as follows: The net area sown increased by 29 million acres and agricultural production touched a peak foodgrain production at 68.7 millions being up by over 15 million tons. The number of rural households rose from 59 million to 67 million, the increase being accounted for by population growth, the gradual dismemberment of the joint family system, the influx and resettlement of refugees and break-up of the holdings following the abolition of intermediaries . . . . The proportion of attached households (i.e. without land) to the total agricultural labour households also rose from ten per cent to 27 per cent. The

increase in landless was particularly noticeable in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, Assam, Kerala, Madras and Mysore consequent to the abolition of intermediaries and resumption of land for personal cultivation by the farmer. The passage of tenancy laws also possibly led to the eviction of share-croppers in certain states. . . . The most striking fact that emerges is that the average daily wage of all agricultural labourers fell during the period under review; that of men from 109nP to 96nP that of women from 68nP to 59nP and that of children from 70nP to 53nP. The average annual income of agricultural labour households similarly declined from Rs. 447 to Rs. 437 between 1951 and 1957. At the same time the average annual consumption expenditure rose from Rs. 461 to Rs. 618 per household. The annual household budgetary deficit of Rs. 180 in 1957 being met by drafts on past savings, sales of stocks and additions to debt . . . ”

“The proportion of indebtedness rose from 45 percent to 64 percent of all agricultural labour households . . . Several casual agricultural labourers lost their land in debt bondage.

“The total volume of indebtedness of all agricultural labour households increased from Rs. 80 crores in 1951 to Rs. 143 crores in 1958 . . . What are the conclusions to be drawn from the report? One obvious inference is that the country's growing rural population cannot be supported on land and must be found gainful employment in ancillary occupations, industry and services. This is a pressing social, economic and political problem. But the planners are still unfortunately only content to try and tackle it on an experimental basis. This is also the kind of real planning problem which never gets to the National Development Council which has steadily deteriorated into a talking-shop for platitudes.”<sup>15</sup>

#### CRUCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE FINDINGS

We have extensively quoted from these major Reports because they are supposed to be the most authentic and comprehensive inquiries conducted to study the problem of indebtedness. The problem of agrarian indebtedness has acquired a very controversial character. We have relied only

on the official reports to analyse the problem of indebtedness. What conclusions can we draw from the findings of these enquiries ?

(a) The basic forces which generate indebtedness operate almost in the same manner for the vast majority of marginal and sub-marginal farmers as they did two decades ago. The developments during War and Post-war Plan periods have not brought about any *qualitative change* in the socio-economic set up. In fact, the forces which generate indebtedness are being more and more intensified.

(b) Nay, with the growing monetization and commercialization of agricultural production and that too for the profit-oriented competitive market matrix, the bigger farmers are growing stronger at the cost of marginal and sub-marginal farmers. The condition of agricultural labour is also deteriorating in every respect.

(c) The grip of the moneylender-cum-trader is becoming tighter on poor peasants. A section of the big cultivators have also started the business of moneylending to medium and small farmers transforming them into their bond slaves, or turning them into their labourers by absorbing their land. Thus a polarization process is going on which is enriching the substantial farmers and reducing sub-marginal cultivator to the position of landless labourers.

(d) The loans from the Government and the organized credit agencies like cooperatives are taken advantage of only by big and large cultivators.

(e) The market-mechanism operates like a pincer against the small farmer. A large majority of cultivators are squeezed as sellers and also made to suffer as purchasers.

Do these findings provide an optimistic picture about indebtedness for the future ?

#### IMPACT OF LEGISLATIVE MEASURES

However, before we draw any significant social conclusions arising from these findings, it will be interesting to assess the impact of various legislative and other measures



adopted by the Government to mitigate the evils of indebtedness.

The Government of India has published a series of volumes embodying the various enactments passed for different objects pertaining to Agricultural problems. Vol. I, of Agricultural Legislation provides a detailed account of laws passed to regulate moneylending. An introduction attached to that volume assesses the effectiveness of these legislative measures. We will briefly quote their findings which are as follows:

"The main provisions of some of the important Acts comprise (i) the licencing and registration of moneylenders, (ii), maintenance of accounts in prescribed forms, (iii) furnishing of receipts and periodical statement of accounts to the dealers, (iv) fixing of maximum rates of interests, (v) protection of debtors from molestation and intimidation, and (vi) penalties for infringement of the provisions."<sup>16</sup>

What are the findings?

- (1) All the Acts are, however, not equally comprehensive.
- (2) The scope of the Acts is not uniform.
- (3) The rates of interest permitted under the different Acts vary greatly.

(4) "Although legislation for the regulation of money-lending has been enacted and enforced in most of the states, in practically none of them has any adequate machinery been set up for the specific purpose of ensuring an effective implementation of the various measures. The responsibility of the general administration of the moneylending legislation has generally been vested in authorities already functioning and discharging some other state responsibilities."<sup>17</sup>

(5) "Registration of the moneylenders, however, is the simplest of the responsibilities placed on the state by the various regulatory measures. Hardly, in any state have adequate arrangements been made to supervise over the activities of the registered moneylenders, or to check surreptitious money-lending by the unregistered lenders."<sup>18</sup>

(6) "Because of the inadequacy of the supervising machinery, absence of an alternate source of credit and the



compelling nature of the borrowers' requirements, the moneylenders are able without much difficulty to evade almost all important provisions of these enactments."<sup>19</sup>

(7) "No adequate machinery could be set up in any state to ensure that the accounts maintained by moneylenders correctly represented the transactions between them and their debtors. In the absence of an alternate credit agency which could satisfy his credit requirements on terms better than those offered by the moneylenders, even the borrower of substantial means would collude with the moneylenders in the making up of the false accounts. . . There are a number of ways of circumventing these provisions. . . The modes of evasion reported are as numerous as they are ingenious. Only a few need be mentioned by way of illustration. (1) Obtaining a pronote for a larger amount of principal than that actually lent; (2) interest computed at illegal rate and deducted in advance from the amount lent; (3) the making of a separate pronote (besides the main one) in the name of the servant or relative of the moneylender to cover extra interest; (4) forward purchase, together with false evaluation of the debtor's produce; (5) conditional sale; (6) unobjectionable sale-deed for the purposes of the law, and illegal, if informal understanding as to real substance of contract; and taking over of debtor's land on mortgage on terms which in effect imply the charging of illegal interest or taking on mortgage the milch cattle of the debtor on a similar basis."<sup>20</sup>

(8) "Besides the scope for evasion of the provision of these Acts by licensed moneylenders, evidence so far collected goes to show that in most states, a large proportion of the moneylenders still carry on their business without license."<sup>21</sup>

(9) So far as the provisions of these Acts . . . in most states effective measures for enforcing them have not been taken and, in practice, they are violated in letter in a very large number of cases and in spirit in most cases. The result is that these provisions have, on the whole, failed in affecting much of an improvement in the terms on which private credit is available to the cultivators."<sup>22</sup>

(10) Money-lending legislation might have generally lowered the standard of morality among the class of money-lenders as a whole."<sup>23</sup>

No comments are necessary to assess the role of this legislation in protecting the cultivating classes.

### CONCLUSION

We have now completed our survey of the trend of rural indebtedness during last two decades. We have analysed its impact on different strata of agrarian society. What significant facts emerge from this survey? What conclusions do these facts force us to draw?

(a) The main factors responsible for forcing cultivators to borrow still operate with the same intensity, excepting for a small stratum of big cultivators. Nay, in the matrix of competitive economic mechanism, they affect very adversely the marginal and sub-marginal farmers, thus generating a process of disintegration of small and middle peasantry and the resultant differentiation and polarization of agrarian population. This process is assisting the emergence of a small section of substantial farmers at the cost of the vast bulk of middle and small farmers. The economic and social policies of the Government of India as unfolded in their Plans and welfare measures fundamentally keep agricultural production system as a vast competitive jungle where cut-throat struggle between suppliers of finance and borrowers, between rich competitors and very poor competitors, is going on in a very furious manner. The majority of cultivators are conducting the farm business on fragmented farms on which even wisest of the experts cannot even secure mere subsistence. The farmer has to shoulder the burden of debt working on his deficit farms. Can he ever free himself from this burden, unless a radical overhaul of the entire structure is undertaken, unless this *jungle called free market* is replaced by a well-planned structural change consciously designed to eliminate the chief cause of the ruination and resultant indebtedness of marginal and sub-marginal farmers? It means freeing the entire process of production

from the ups and downs of fluctuating price zigzags bound up with the profit-oriented market mechanism and transforming it as a part of the overall planned social order.

(b) The legislative and other measures are not merely proving ineffective but are generating effects which strengthen the rich sections, make them more immoral and assist them to violate the laws without compunction. A new power-structure is emerging in rural areas composed of money-lender-cum-trader, substantial farmer, and the administrative echelons, who predominantly happen also to belong to upper castes and probably to the same strata. This power group transforms every measure to its own advantage at the cost of marginal and sub-marginal farmers and agricultural labourers. The present authorities are unable to arrange for the adequate supply of finance to the cultivators.

(3) "Supply of finance for agriculture in adequate quantities is regarded as lynch-pin of the programme for rural development, for in an economy organised on the basis of private individual enterprise, the private units of operation must be enabled to acquire the necessary requisites for improving their efficiency and this in the present deficit agricultural economy of the country pre-supposes a system of credit for various productive purposes, by offering terms specially suited to these purposes."

In spite of the pointed revelations of all the findings, none of the official experts confront one crucial question pertaining to this problem viz. can the Government wedded to the postulate of a mixed economy, co-operative societies operating in the setting of competitive profit-oriented productive system based on private enterprise, or the Banks operating on the same principles provide the necessary finance to the agriculturists within the framework of the present socio-economic set up?

Immense literature is being published discussing alternative ways of financing the agriculturists within the matrix of the present social set up. Heated discussions have been launched to establish whether co-operatives or the Banks are the adequate agencies for finance. Those who champion the cause of co-operatives carry on hair-splitting discussions about

state aided co-operatives *vs.* voluntary co-operatives, single purpose co-operatives *vs.* multi-purpose co-operatives, small-village level co-operatives *vs.* large multi-purpose and multi-villages level co-operatives. Those who are protagonists of Banks as suppliers of finance similarly conduct a nauseatingly useless discussion on the type of bank which should function as an agency supplying credit. Some experts discuss whether the credit agencies should be created to oust the moneylender or to absorb him after rationalising his practices.

Vast majority of farmers operate on uneconomic fragmented holdings with deficit returns, compelling them to borrow not merely for production but continuously for consumption. Debt for consumption will be a continuing and aggravating feature in the life of marginal and sub-marginal farmers till the present set up persists. It will be a regular feature, an incessant and increasing requirement within the present socio-economic framework for these marginal and sub-marginal farmers whose relative position is weakening both as a result of rising cost of living and their diminishing competitive power in the society.

Can any manipulation of credit mechanism solve this problem within the framework of the extant social order ?

Can the Plans launched by the Government of the Indian Union on the basis the postulate of a mixed economy and on the basis of private property in land, free enterprise in agriculture, profit as the motif of production and competition in the market as the mechanism of realising this profit, even usher in a rural social framework wherein the vast majority of very weak farmers with their uneconomic holdings can survive the onslaughts of competition ?

In fact, the Land Reforms, Community Development Projects, Debt Relief Measures, Facilities of Irrigation and other amenities for improving agriculture, Taxation Policies and the elaborating of various institutions and associations by the Government, as indicated in most of the Evaluation Reports, have basically only helped to strengthen the richer strata in the countryside.

The problem of agrarian indebtedness is bound up with, nay is almost a manifestation of, the operation of the very



socio-economic structure which is being evolved by the Government of the Indian Union. The Plans adumbrated by the Government of the Indian Union are themselves strengthening the upper strata of the agrarian society.

Cancellation of old debts, radical reorganisation of the property structure in agrarian area based on allotting the land to the actual cultivator without the encumbrance of compensation, high rents and taxes, and not allotting the land to the class of pseudo-cultivators, as is being done to-day, appointment of peasant committees of the actual tillers and agrarian labourers and not the multi-class Panchayats, the preserves of the economically dominant groups, to reorganise agricultural and ancillary production on co-operative lines are the preliminary conditions necessary to initiate any real improvement without uprooting the small farmers.

The Plans, as they are formulated and operated to-day, perpetuate the same mechanism of market which has proved to be the paradise for traders as well as rich cultivators and the hang-man's noose round the neck of the poor farmers. The Government of the Indian Union, under the pretence of such slogans as freedom, democracy, individual liberty, personal rights voluntarism, and others, refuse to adopt the drastic and essential measure to eradicate this complicated mechanism of market which is the happy, hunting ground for a vast chain of middle-men and profiteers with all their fraudulent practices, and which has become only a graveyard for small farmers. If freedom and democracy could be compatible with state administration of railways, and postal and other means of communication, if freedom and democracy could be compatible with passing of laws determining partition and inheritance of property, with also regulating various types of social relations, one wonders how freedom and democracy would be jeopardized if the Government undertakes to provide a well ramified service wherein small farmers are freed from the clutches of the market. In fact such service alone destroys the unfreedom of the vast bulk of the rural population who are chained to the juggernaut of market. The upholders of free trade or private trade, never squarely confront the basic question viz. the fate of the



vast majority of marginal and sub-marginal cultivators in the competitive matrix of free trade.

The problem of agrarian Indebtedness is both a symptom and a cause of contemporary social malaise.

To conclude, as it has been pointed out by the U.N.O. publication on Land Reforms "Defects in Agrarian Structure as obstacle to Economic Development," the causes of indebtedness are to be found in the very socio-economic structure itself. "They lie ... in the chronic insufficiency of farmers' income, and the consequent tendency of consumption to out-run production. The problem of credit cannot be solved in terms of reform of the credit mechanism alone and that the extension of credit facilities to small farmers through the co-operative principle can be successful if it is applied as a part of a general programme of agricultural reorganisation."<sup>24</sup> Can Plans based on the postulates of mixed economy ever bring about such a basic reorganisation of Agrarian Structure?

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## 8 | A Critical Note on Taylor's Evaluation of Community Development Programme

Professor Carl C. Taylor's Report containing 'A Critical Analysis of India's Community Development Programme', according to him, is based on a 'bifocal or stereoptic view of India's Community Development Programme'; One focus, his personal observation in India and the other focus, his observation of a similar character in a fairly large number of other underdeveloped and developed countries. Thus, it is a Report based on a comparative type of analysis.

The report consists of three parts.

In the first part, which is comprised of the first five chapters, Professor Taylor elaborates the theoretical framework of the Community Development and Extension Programme. According to him, "the whole concept and plan of Community Development-Extension Programme is that local self-help village groups will mobilize their natural and human resources for local improvements of all kinds and all technical agencies of Government will aid them in these undertakings."

According to him, the Community Development and Extension Programme should be based upon :

- (a) the self-initiative of the people both in formulating and executing the programmes;
- (b) therefore, generating and organizing the scheme of a large number of voluntary associations almost of the primary group nature and also a wide variety of local institutions;
- (c) reliance upon group-work technique;
- (d) active participation of the people in all the stages of the implementation of the programme; and

- (e) a governmental administrative machinery which acts as an assisting body encouraging and stimulating the creative initiative and participation of the people through their voluntary associations and local institutions. The personnel of the administrative machinery—at all levels—should not merely be equipped with administrative and other technical skill, but must be fairly well-versed in social skills, skills based on the knowledge of social laws about voluntary associations and community participation.

Professor Taylor is convinced that the Government of the Indian Union is fully aware of and has faith in the basic postulates of the Community Development and Extension Programmes. He quotes Prime Minister Nehru and the formulations in the First Five Year Plan to substantiate his conviction. He also admiringly describes the enthusiasm and earnestness of the Government on this point and considers the gigantic Community Development and Extension Programmes adumbrated by the Government as great measures to democratically revolutionize the agrarian society. He fully endorses the objectives and methods adopted in the First and the Second Five Year Plans to reconstruct the national economy and attempts to assess the role and results of the Community Development processes generated in the Rural Society by the Government. This assessment is made in part two which consists of chapters six to eleven.

Professor Taylor attempts to assess the significance of Community Development and Extension Programmes by subjecting to criticism their four facets. These are : (1) the organization and the mode of the functioning of the elaborate governmental machinery consisting of Village Level Workers at the Base, and tyreing upward *via* Block Development Officers to District Officers, and assisted by a staff of specialists of different Extension Services and Social Education Officers; (2) voluntary associations and local institutions; (3) the organization evaluating the Community Development and Extension Programmes; and (4) the spirit which permeates the operation of the Programmes.



His major criticism against the governmental machinery is based on his observation that the entire machinery though composed of intelligent, hard-working and conscientious persons, has not still assimilated the true spirit underlying the entire programme. Broadly, Community Development and Extension Programmes are more in the nature of executive assignments on behalf of the Government. Further, the personnel and particularly that among the higher rungs, has hardly any notion of the social skills which are so essential for making Community Development Programmes as genuine peoples' programmes. So far as voluntary associations and local institutions are concerned, Professor Taylor has to admit that, they have not developed in any significant manner. Nay, this lack of development of voluntary associations and local institutions has deprived the entire movement of the contribution to it, of those natural and local leaders who emerge and participate only when such voluntary associations function and local institutions flourish. Professor Taylor is, however, full of praise for the Programme Evaluation Organization. However, he suggests that the organization should undertake evaluation and research of more fundamental and subtle aspects of the development programmes. According to him, "Measures should be designed and used to assess the extent to which the so-called intangible but desired psychological, social and cultural results are being accomplished. The functioning of local voluntary groups, the development or lack of development of local leaders, the successes or failures of Panchayats, and of various types of co-operatives, the social skills of the administrators in various levels of programme operation, the extent to which Community Development-Extension methods are or are not being used, the extent to which the disadvantaged classes are or are not being reached and helped, even the degree to which villagers' outlooks are being changed, should all be studied by the Programme Evaluation Organization. There are methods of determining the extent to which the programme is reaching all segments of village people and where it is not, and why. Attitudes, intentions, and aspirations can be identified and so collated as to be objectively analytical. The extent to which social skills are being used in administra-



tion can be identified, collated and analyzed. There are validated methods of making all these types of analysis. The Programme Evaluation Organization should be so staffed that it can use them."

Regarding the fourth facet of the Community Development and Extension Programmes, Professor Taylor is of the opinion that still the spirit underlying the present programme is predominantly that of aid from the Government and reliance on the Government. The programme is still not permeated with the true spirit of Community Development. The initiative of the people is still lacking. Even the Government machinery also concentrates more on methods of propaganda and spectacular results rather than on methods of group initiative, voluntary creative participation and reliance upon contributions of self-acting people. According to Professor Taylor, a certain amount of active and energetic Government participation was inevitable in a country like India during the earlier phases of the movement. But if that earlier phase was not crossed over, and if the movement did not elicit active participation of and self-initiative from the people, the very basis of the Community Development Programme would be corroded. That danger was slowly raising its head in India against which the sponsors of the programme should be vigilant.

This in brief is Professor Taylor's assessment of the Community Development and Extension Programmes.

In the third part embodying Recapitulation and Suggestions and Epilogue, Professor Taylor offers his solution for remedying the defects. According to him, "Community Development is not merely a programme of rural welfare. It is also an essential programme for developing an increasingly more efficient rural economy.....It should be recognized that the prime function of Community Development-Extension methods is the development of rural people as a national resource. This developed resource will strengthen the rural economy and develop village communities. It will permit persons now living in villages successfully to ascend the ladder of social and technical competence and thus supply rural migrants to man a rapidly developing industrial economy. Because Community Development-Extension method and

education perform these vital social development functions, they are essential components of all other programmes of development and further....."this final great objective of Community Development will not be obscured if all the levels of Government personnel working in the Community Development Programme understand and constantly use sound Community Development-Extension Methods.

"To train tens of thousands of personnel in the understanding and use of these methods is the most important task of the Community Development-Extension Programme. Whether it is done at the earliest possible moment is the most crucial issue in India's whole national development programme." According to Professor Taylor, "If both personnel in these lower echelons and State Development Departments are trained in these methods there is every reason to believe that the major weakness of the Community Development Programme.....will be gradually but surely eliminated."

This in brief is the stereoptic and critical Analysis of India's Community Development Programme by the author.

One wonders whether an eminent sociologist of the calibre of Carl Taylor was required to make such simple and trite observations. Even the Programme Evaluation Reports have raised more fundamental issues and have pointed out some of the alarming consequences of the Community Development Programmes. We will mention the following features of the development as pointed out by the Community Evaluation Reports which should have been the starting point of Professor Taylor's analysis: (a) The advantages of improvements are taken predominantly by substantial farmers; (b) the contributions to be made by the village people are felt as very burdensome by the lower sections of the people (c) The organization emerging in these areas for bringing about rural change are dominated by upper sections of the rural population, the poorer ones having 'no stake in them.' (d) The initial enthusiasm born of great hopes in the prospects is slowly declining among the lower strata of the population.

The above are the central problems of all agrarian programmes of the Government of India and they also emerge as

a result of the joint operation of Government policies and Community Development Programmes within the matrix of the theory of a plan based on a mixed economy.

An analysis of the stupendous Indian rural problem demands a four dimensional approach : (1) a study of the matrix of Caste and its role; (2) a study of the emerging matrix of Class and its role; (3) a study of the background of a changing economy changing from a self-sufficient subsistence economy to a competitive profit-based market economy; and (4) the study of the phenomena of the persistence and active operation of the enormous deadweight of old institutional and ideological forces.

This four dimensional perspective is not merely most appropriate but is the only perspective if a scientific analysis of any of the Indian social phenomena has to be made. It alone can provide us a synthetic understanding of the structure, the functioning and the changes as well as the forces generating those changes and also the direction of development and transformation of the Indian social organization.

Considerable literature on various aspects of Indian life has been accumulating in recent times. Eminent scholars have shed light on a number of these problems. Unfortunately, Professor Taylor, who was expected to elevate the discussion from a point where Programme Evaluation Reports have left it, even does not refer to these crucial problems. Professor Taylor has been a specialist on Community Development Programme. He has visited a number of countries, both developed and underdeveloped, where these experiments are being made. He has acquired a reputation as an eminent rural sociologist. At least from a sociologist of his calibre and repute, the following aspects were expected to have been discussed in his report :

(1) What enthusiasm does Community Development Programmes engender among and what response does it evoke from the vast mass of unemployed and under-employed agricultural labourers, uneconomic cultivators and also ruined artisans in rural areas in other countries? This is the crucial problem of all under-developed countries. One would have

been really happy to profit from his observations about other countries and India on this count. The Programme Evaluation Report has categorically stated that the Indian Community Development Programme assist the richer sections of the rural society. Professor Taylor should have squarely confronted this most crucial issue in all underdeveloped countries, investigated it and arrived at some conclusions.

(2) Indian rural society is the theatre of the experimenting of various reform and welfare projects. Such movements as the Bhoodan Movement, the Sarvodaya Movement, and also other constructive and welfare movements have been launched to renovate the agrarian society. Numerous economic and political organizations operate in rural areas with their respective programmes of agrarian reconstruction. Among these are political parties and welfare organizations, panchayats, co-operatives. Other institutions also function with the same objective in view. Caste organizations and religious institutions and associations also considerably influence the life of the people. An analysis of Community Development Programmes without correlating them with these movements and organizations can be seriously inadequate, even superficial. Unfortunately, even though Project Evaluation Reports have indicated some of these vital issues, Professor Taylor almost bypasses them.

(3) While appreciating his emphasis on the need for training in social skills by the administrative staff, one may ask a significant question to Professor Taylor. Is it purely the ignorance of social skills that is responsible for the bureaucratic functioning of the personnel, or is it also due to the fundamental limitations of the policies embodied in the Plans which among other things, also do not provide avenues for a large section of the agrarian population?

Have we not to advance a more fundamental sociological question with regard to the total policy of the Government, economic, social, political and cultural which shapes the entire physiognomy of Indian social life?

Professor Taylor should have evaluated and criticised the Community Development Programmes from this deeper stand-

point and shown, on the basis of his experience, the concrete ways and means to resolve the problems of the Indian rural people.

Unfortunately, Professor Taylor ends his analysis and report at that very point where he should have actually started.



## 9 | Community Development and Sarvodaya — Their Dangerous Implications

Our rural development projects are mammoth and costly measures which seek to renovate our economy and society in keeping with the five year plans' over-all objectives based on the fundamental postulates of a Mixed Economy.

Since Independence, the two major, comprehensive movements operating in rural India have been Sarvodaya and Community Development. The Sarvodaya movement is supposed to be based upon the philosophical doctrines of Mahatma Gandhi as expressed in his constructive programme for village reorganization. It is claimed that the doctrines have been theoretically refined by Vinoba Bhave and Jayaprakash Narayan.

The Sarvodaya work has, in the main, been carried on by non-official agencies and the organization staffed by a band of workers, most of whom belong to the constructive social-welfare worker wing of the Congress Party. It has also been manned by other groups who are not attached to the Congress Party but who adhere to the Gandhian theory of the "change of heart."

### HARMONY OF CLASSES

In some States, such as Bombay, the Sarvodaya schemes have been undertaken by government and implemented "by trained and trusted social workers, designated as *Sanchalaka*" at the village level, area Sarvodaya Committees and the State Sarvodaya Committee. Basically the Sarvodaya movement, however, attempts to integrate the non-official agencies in the sphere of rural reconstruction.

The movement is founded upon the doctrine of the harmony of classes, and its method of realising the ideal social order is to convert the exploiting and propertied classes

through a moral appeal, thereby provoking them to indulge in various *daans*. There is no fixed blueprint for the type of society which it wants to establish, nor is the structure of the actual type of rural society it envisages clearly elaborated.

### INTER-RELATIONS

It has not formulated the design of the rural regions, the pattern of the inter-relations of different rural zones against the background of advancing technology, the developing means of communications and the resulting intertwining of various agrarian areas. The questions of how rural areas are to be linked with urban areas, how rural society is to be fused with the emerging industrial social order are not answered.

Fundamentally, Sarvodya is against industrialization and it dreams of a social order founded on decentralized, self-sufficient village communities based on plough agriculture and a handicrafts economy. The movement is diametrically opposed to the organization of the exploited sections in rural areas, on class lines or to their being led by movements based on the principle of class struggle. It vigorously carries on a campaign to create a climate against the development of class consciousness, class organizations, and class struggles of the exploited strata.

Community Development, is, on the other hand, an elaborate State-sponsored and officially-manned movement. It has been designed to meet the ideas embodied in the five year plans for the industrialization of Indian economy and the reconstruction of society on that basis.

From 1952, the Community Development movement has extended to different parts of the country. It has increasingly enveloped larger and larger zones of agrarian India and its impact is being studied very closely by government's Programme Evaluation Organization. This organization produces various publications, including evaluation reports, which analyse the work and results of the Community Development Projects.

### IMPACT

The impact of these projects is also watched and com-

mented upon by other organizations as well as by various eminent scholars such as Professors Wilson, Taylor, Oscar Lewis, Opler, Mandelbaum, Dube, Sangave and Chapekar. The experts have already determined some of the peculiar features inherent in the work of these projects. We will briefly enumerate the results of their studies.

It is felt that the Projects have failed to generate initiative amongst the masses of our people. They are operated in a spirit of bureaucratic paternalism. The entire machinery of the Community Development is bureaucratic throughout. It has no elective units at any level, thereby denying vital and popular participation in the implementation of the schemes. Decisions about both the planning and execution of the programmes are handed down as executive orders from above.

The confusion over the jurisdiction and powers of the Project administration and other government departments, the absence of a social service attitude, the acceptance of credit for achievements which rightly belong to other departments, the lack of skilled social workers and the overloading of work upon the poorly paid Gram Sevak (village level worker) are some of these features.

In the initial stages, in the outline of the draft plan, the sponsors had visualised a four-tiered structure of the rural community starting with the village as the smaller unit, next the Mandi, then the Rur-Urb zone and, finally, the Urb-Rur Unit as a part of a still larger region. In practice, however, they have eliminated the two middle tiers as unfeasible and accepted the existing administrative taluka and district as the higher tiers.

Further, the gigantic industrial processes which are being introduced to the country, the multipurpose hydro-electric irrigation projects and the monetization of the entire agrarian economy have been ignored. Neither have the planners examined whether the village unit, which is the foundation of the entire scheme, would remain a valid unit of agrarian society after the basis of present day agricultural production has been transformed. Massive irrigation projects, the extension of electric power and the building of complex and swift means of modern transport and communications, will

come into operation and destroy the isolation of these village communities.

The Community Development Projects operate on the assumption that the existing villages will remain the basic units of social life for the vast bulk of the people. No definite pattern of regional reconfiguration is visible. The evaluation reports have also pointed out that, as a result of the operation of these Projects, a growing imbalance between villages has emerged, some gaining at the expense of others and so creating an uneven rural development.

### THE BENEFITS

Another characteristic effect of the Projects is that the benefits of the movement are reaped by the larger farmers and upper sections of the village community. They become strengthened economically and secure the facilities provided by the movement.

This phenomenon, against the background of the growing competitive, profit-oriented, monetized and commercial trend of the entire economy, creates a favourable situation for the richer sections of the agrarian area. They advance at the expense of the poorer sections; this only causes greater inequality and polarization between the two.

It is curious that, in spite of the fact that every project evaluation report mentions this inequitable development, which is corroborated by the findings of independent scholars who have studied specific Blocks, government continues to persist with the same programme.

Professor Mandelbaum reports that official measures are widening the gulf between peasant agriculturists and landless labourers. The programme evaluation reports state that there is a growing disparity between landless labourers and agriculturists, between those who farm food crops and those who farm commercial cash crops, between Producers in subsistence and commercial belts; "a matter of serious concern not only in terms of regional and social justice but also in terms of political consequences that may ensue in the context of the increasing awakening among the people."



## POOR SUFFER

Professor Dube explains in his *India's Changing Villages* that the benefits of the Community Development activities went basically "to the elite and to the more affluent and influential agriculturists." He also points out that, for the economic development of poor agriculturists, "as well as for that of the artisans and the agricultural labourers, no programmes were initiated by the Projects."

Another peculiarity is that the organizations which are created and operated by government, are dominated, and encouraged to be dominated, by the upper section of the agrarian areas. One Report mentions that, "The pattern of membership in village organizations, be they co-operative societies, Vikas Mandals, Gram Panchayats or Nyaya Panchayats..... is confined to the large cultivators, and that smaller cultivators, as well as landless agricultural labours, have practically no stake in the organizations of the village".

Professor Dube and others find that the Community Development Projects seek co-operation with and rely for their activities upon the groups of traditional leaders belonging to the upper caste and upper land-owning groups which create a liaison between them and the official world. The two strengthen each other and hence provide government with an agency to buttress its own hold upon the village, which prevents any effort on the part of the under-privileged, lower strata to organize their resistance. It also arms the exploiting and privileged strata of the village with political and institutional backing against any struggles organised from below on class lines.

Contributions are demanded from the lower strata in the form of shramdans and "voluntary" unpaid labour. These shramdans are glorified in terms of self-help, but the lower strata consider them an unwelcome imposition. They find that shramdan deprives them of their opportunity for paid work and view it, in Professor Dube's words, "as a revival of begar, a practice under which influential landowners and government officials compelled the poorer people to work without wages, or at nominal wages, and which is now prohibited by law."



The entire movement ignores the problem of handling land relations as also the problem of reorganizing units of cultivation. The reports do not even consider these items as a part of their evaluatory objective. Such an omission, in a country where the overwhelming section of the cultivators farm uneconomic, inefficient and fragmented strips of land, makes the entire effort beneficial only to the substantial farmer.

#### WISE OBSERVATIONS

Professor Gadgil's wise observations on this aspect of the entire movement are worth noting. He writes: "The Planning Commission appears content to operate with the existing unit of agricultural production and does not propose to change in any radical manner the organization of land management and operation. . . . The experts appear to talk almost exclusively of the peasant unit and their ideas of land reform are confined mostly to the abolition of intermediaries and the dealing with larger estates. . . . The Community Projects are supposed to be the special field of the Planning Commission and great reliance is placed on them in relation to development in the future. Not only do these projects pay no attention to land reform or land distribution, but experimentation in relation to land management appears to find no place in them."

#### LAND REFORM

Professor Gadgil also points to a fact which is corroborated by all eminent thinkers—that the problem of land distribution to the tillers, and the formation of larger consolidated units of cultivation, is a "sine qua non". However, the entire movement is organized without this basic foundation of agrarian development. Consequently it ceases to be a genuine community development movement and remains only a movement for those sections which have larger holdings, and which have the prerequisite to take advantage of the facilities offered.

In the context of the competitive, capitalist, profit-oriented structure of our economy this means assistance to the substantial farmers, who become more efficient, more resourceful and better equipped to weed out the weak competitors from the market.

All this raises a number of questions about the actual role of Community Development. Are the Projects useless? Have they failed? Are they capable of being revised and reformed to bring about the results desired? Are the postulates of the Projects sound and correct? Are the authorities aware of the defects of these Projects? If so, why is nothing done to remedy them?

Some eminent scholars and organizations, who have drawn attention to these peculiarities, treat them unfortunately as deformities of the movement. They accept the postulates of government's economic policy and the underlying philosophy which shapes that policy. They assume that individuals, sections and groups forming the village community have basic common interests; that there is no irreconcilable conflict of interest among them: that the present State of India is a supra-class, impartial and non-partisan institution capable of formulating policies which subserve and advance the interests of all classes simultaneously.

On the basis of these assumptions, the entire analysis of the Community Development Projects is bound to be distorted. However, the peculiarities, which appear as deformities, have an underlying unity which has to be grasped if the role of the Community Development Projects is to be properly comprehended.

Economically, these Projects strengthen the richer peasants. Socially, they arm the upper strata by assuring them control over all the major institutions and agencies for ideological propaganda; they strengthen their cultural hold. Strategically, they provide a fruitful liaison between the machinery of State and this upper stratum of the rural areas. And above all they provide agencies to counteract any formation and strengthening of the class organizations of the exploited strata by the powerful propagation of the deceptive ideology of common interests and of class harmony through the effective use of institutions which have been evolved in each village, and which are controlled by these selfsame upper sections.

#### UNDERLYING UNITY

The underlying unity of purpose revealed in the peculiar impact of the Community Development Projects could be

explained only if the deeper class objectives on which they are based were grasped and understood. In such a context the apparent weaknesses would appear in an altogether different light:

a) It is a fundamental distortion of reality to presume that agrarian society (including its village unit) is a homogeneous society. The agrarian society is torn into classes with irreconcilably conflicting interests.

b) The activities which assist the upper strata in the context of the capitalist, competitive, economic matrix, inevitably harm the interests of the exploited and propertyless classes.

c) The economic policy of the Government of India is devised in such a manner that it creates a bourgeois social order. Its guarantee of the right to property as fundamental, its declarations of industrial policy (both of 1948 and 1956) as well as its basic budgetary policies, prove this clearly. Government has launched economic plans which are functionally capitalist in their postulates. Its industrial and agrarian policies are designed to create capital formation within the matrix of the private property system. Its assurances to and agreements with, foreign private capital also confirm this.

d) The State of India, after Independence, is not an impartial supra-class State, but a State of the Indian capitalist class. It dare not permit local self-initiative and power at all levels, particularly for the masses of people. It must operate bureaucratically.

#### CLASS CHARACTER OF AGRARIAN POLICY

The agrarian policy of the Indian Government, therefore, has to have the following features:

a) It must be bureaucratic. The initiative and control must remain with the upper strata and the governmental apparatus.

b) It must be unplanned since it retains the entire agrarian production in the hands of the private sector. It cannot, therefore, elaborate a structural, all-sided, comprehensive and symmetrical plan of regional development.

c) Being wedded to capitalist postulates it must strengthen those strata which assist capitalist development, even in

agrarian areas. Neither dare it bring about a basic change in property relations, nor can it revolutionize the units of cultivation.

d) It must also build up a close liaison between the upper stratum of the agrarian population and government to prevent the masses from organizing themselves for their class aspirations which come into collision with the interests subserved by official economic measures.

e) In a backward, under-developed country, the bourgeoisie and its State possess limited resources. They and their State can exist only by the intensified exploitation of the people. Its policy must, therefore, evolve programmes which will demand greater sacrifices from the people. It must also, therefore, develop a huge propaganda machine to prevent the masses from realizing the true pro-capitalist essence of government's programmes and policies. In addition, it must delude them into believing that their increased sufferings are entirely in their own interest.

#### WARNING

There is a peculiar dialectical unity of the Sarvodaya movement with the Community Development movement. Both movements are founded on class collaborationist principles. Both oppose the class organizations and the class struggles of the exploited strata. Whatever the differences between them, both movements unite in this basic common task.

The Sarvodaya movement wants to remove the ills of the agrarian society by emphasising constructive work, tolerance and thrift to the exploited strata and by appeals to indulge in *daans* to the upper strata. The Community Development movement wants to reconstruct the agrarian society through the provision of facilities to the upper strata in the agrarian areas. Both claim to take their basic inspiration from Gandhian philosophy. Both work, with minor differences, hand in glove with one another and also with mutual sympathy and considerable co-operation.

It is unfortunate that the socialist and communist forces in India have not realized fully this fundamental class character of both movements which has such dangerous implications.

## *Impact of Government Measures on the Life of Rural People*

The paper represents an attempt at a brief review, in a very broad outline, of the changes that have been taking place in the rural life of India under the impact of the various measures of the Indian Union Government.

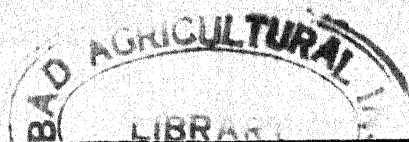
The choice of the subject has been prompted by the following considerations :

### INDIAN SOCIETY IN TRANSITION

Indian society has been experiencing one of its greatest transitions in history since the advent of the British rule. Its technological foundation, its economic structure, its social institutional framework based on the caste-system and the joint family, its political organization, its ideological orientation and cultural value systems have been undergoing a qualitative transformation. As the British rulers generated changes in Indian society basically to serve their own interests, these changes were not uniform or symmetrical and, therefore, created specific types of contradictions and antagonisms within Indian society.

After the withdrawal of the British from India, the Indian people have entered a new phase of existence ; independence has released their initiative and creative energies. The government as well as other agencies have been evolving and operating various schemes to bring about changes in the social, economic, political and cultural life of the people. The study of these changes is fascinating and instructive as it gives glimpses of the social change affecting one fifth of mankind.

Among the various agencies attempting to alter the social





life in India at present the state has acquired signal significance as a factor ushering change. It has been effecting social changes by creating, to use Talcott Parsons' phraseology, "situations in which people must act" as well as by operating on "'subjective' elements—their sentiments, goals, attitudes and definitions of situations".

#### STATE OF INDEPENDENT INDIA—ITS GOAL

The Constitution of the Indian Union has already formulated the goal towards which Indian society is to develop. A secular state, based on universal franchise and with the welfare of its citizens as its prime objective as provided in the fundamental rights and directive principles embodied in the Constitution, is the national ideal which has emerged in free India.

However, to evolve a truly secular state in a country which is a citadel of the most stubborn religious prejudices; to create a social and cultural atmosphere for the intelligent exercise of franchise by citizen who have been living under the traditional, authoritarian social system based on joint family, caste and other semi-feudal social institutions; to develop a welfare economy in a country where the entire productive system has been underdeveloped and fragile and has been, further, increasingly deteriorating; to implement such directive principles of the Constitution as right to work, right to social security, right to education, when even the task of preserving the extant meagre amenities and opportunities of employment has become difficult; and to fashion appropriate social institutions with a view to transform a poor, stratified, predominantly illiterate community into a prosperous, culturally advanced democratic people—this is a task of Herculean dimension.

#### THE LEGACY OF BRITISH RULE

Before we survey the measures adopted by the government of the Indian Union to realize this goal, it is necessary to visualize concretely the type of rural social structure which it

inherited from the British rulers and which became the basis on which it operated.

(a) The British rulers, as is now well-known, had dealt an almost fatal blow to the rural organization which existed for centuries on the foundation of an almost independent and autarchic village community, collectivist in spirit, based on the village possession of land and unity of agriculture and industry, producing for local needs and functioning through three main institutions viz. the Joint Family, the Caste and the Village Panchayat, and paying tribute to the state or the intermediary collectively and in kind out of the actual produce.

(b) They introduced situations "which were external to the social system as a whole" and "independent of the internal institutional structure, or the immediate situations in which large masses of people acted", by almost destroying the collectivist though hierarchic foundations of the social order and by introducing the individualist, competitive *gestalt* within it. They introduced private property in land through *Zamindari* and *Ryotwari* land tenures. They substituted in place of payment of revenue in kind by the village community on the basis of a definite share from the produce, one in cash from the individual, with the inevitable result that the motif of the entire agrarian economy shifted from production for use to production for market, first to secure cash for the payment of revenue and secondly to adjust to the new setting introduced by the British. Thus the agrarian economy was enmeshed into the web of the Indian and world market. By ruining village artisan industries through pushing their own machine-made goods, they destroyed the self-sufficiency of village life. They undermined the authority of the caste and the village *panchayat* by bringing the village under the rule of laws made by the centralized state and depriving the old institutions of their penal powers.

(c) While Britain thus destroyed the old economic and social equilibrium by introducing capitalist economic forms in India, no new equilibrium emerged, since she thwarted free economic development in general, and industrial development in particular, which would have militated against imperialist economic interests. The Indian rural scene, as a result of this,

underwent a transformation based on increased impoverishment of the mass of the rural population, an increasingly deteriorating agrarian economy, sharp changes in rural class structure and fossilization of rural, social and cultural institutions.

(d) This resulted in the lop-sided and unbalanced position of agriculture in the national economy, mass ruination of artisans, overpressure on land, increasing diminution in the size of the holdings, growth of sub-division and fragmentation of land leading to the alarming increase of uneconomic holdings, low yields, rise of massive indebtedness of the peasant population, extending grip of money lenders, traders, landlords and substantial farmers over poor peasantry, steady passing of land from cultivators to creditors and resultant growth of absentee landlordism and rise in the number of landless labourers. In the *zamindari* areas, the letting and sub-letting of land resulted in the extensive growth of functionless non-cultivating rent-receivers creating a chain of intermediaries (tenants, sub-tenants and sub-sub-tenants) whose cumulative burden had to be borne by the actual tiller of the soil.

(e) In the social sphere, the operation of the laws which transformed land into a commodity capable of being bought, sold, mortgaged leased and partitioned, in the economic context described above, engendered centrifugal tendencies in the joint family and led to its increasing disintegration. According to the Report of All India Agricultural Labour Enquiry Committee, the average size of the rural family has dwindled to 5.01 persons. The consequences of the shrinking of family in terms of human relations, emotional and attitudinal imbalance deserve to be stressed.

(f) The caste system experienced a peculiar jolt under the impact of the British rule. Caste ranking and economic status have been closely co-related. "Caste rank is particularly manifest through ritual symbols; a group which was economically well off could acquire ritual hallmark to raise its relative position in the hierarchy".<sup>1</sup>

The impact of the British rule and the developments that took place under it were different on different castes. Some of the upper castes of the old social order acquired control over

land and became land owners. Some of these took to trading, moneylending and such other business. A number of the intermediate castes, as a result of the operation of the laws of market economy, acquired lands and developed into substantial farmers or rich tenants. Many other castes and sub-castes, having lost their occupational security and having no alternative means of employment, took to agriculture, becoming small farmers or agricultural labourers, or vegetated in their traditional occupations. The scheduled castes, depressed classes and aboriginal tribes were more and more transformed into agricultural labourers, agrestic serfs or bond-tillers.

Thus, in the rural area, as a result of the dynamic but increasingly deteriorating economy, a profound socio-economic transformation took place during the British rule. Certain castes acquired a monopoly of economic power and resources. Certain other castes belonging either to upper or intermediate categories struggled to wrest control from the successful caste groups. Other castes suffered a further decline in their economic status. The agrarian area became a vast cauldron of fiercely competing units where the old hierarchy of caste system based on birth, status and ritual hallmarks, was being transformed into a new hierarchy based on the increasing monopoly of wealth, power and culture. However, it should be noted that this competition predominantly operated within the matrix of the caste structure. Castes were competing with castes. There were shifts of power from some of the upper castes either to other upper castes or to some of the intermediate castes. The economically weak lower castes, though they became further weaker in this conflict, also initiated and developed struggles for the removal of their disabilities and the betterment of their conditions. It was unfortunate that this historical process of occupational changes of castes and their new correlations was not properly observed and its significance evaluated till very recently.

#### RURAL INDIA—A STATISTICAL PICTURE

A brief statistical picture of conditions in the rural area will assist us to understand the nature of the legacy inherited



from the British period by the government of the free Indian Union.

Next to China, India is the world's most populous country, having a population of 357 million human beings. Out of these 357 millions nearly 295 millions or about 83 per cent of the total population live in 558,089 villages. Nearly two-thirds of these villages are tiny hamlets with less than 500 inhabitants.

The available cultivable land per capita is only 0.9 acres. It indicates the enormous pressure of population on land. About 75 per cent. of the total sown area is under food crops. The gross value of these crops is only almost equal to that of cash crops though the latter are sown on merely 25 per cent. of the land. About 35 per cent of the total produce is sold by the cultivators. In nearly two thirds of these transactions the commodity is delivered to the trader in the village itself. "The marketing of agricultural produce is largely in the hands of a body of men who, as distinguished from Government and Co-operatives, represent private interests, and who control both the sources of credit and disposal of the produce. Often enough, therefore, the cultivator's position is that of having to bargain, if he can, with someone who commands the money, commands the credit, commands the market and comes with transport".<sup>2</sup> This point is emphasised to highlight the immense power of the new class of creditors and traders in an underdeveloped rural economy which is switching from production for subsistence to a market economy. In the peculiar environment based on the hierarchic caste system, the combination of superior caste prestige and this economic hold needs to be properly understood.

The following is the picture of the rural class structure as it emerged after the British withdrawal :—

Agricultural land Owners :	22.2 per cent.
Agricultural Tenants :	27.2 per cent.
Agricultural Labourers :	30.4 per cent.
Non-Agriculturists	20.2 per cent. <sup>3</sup>

The inequality of the cultivators' holdings is also considerable. "Holdings below one acre formed about 17 per cent ; those



between 1 and  $2\frac{1}{2}$  acres about 21 per cent ; and those between  $2\frac{1}{2}$  acres to 5 acres another 21 per cent. These accounted respectively for 1.0, 4.6 and 9.9 per cent of the total area. At the other end of the scale, 16 per cent were in the group 10 to 25 acres accounting for 32.5 per cent of the area and another 5.6 per cent above 25 acres covering about 34 per cent of the area.”<sup>4</sup> And further, “The large cultivator cultivates 58 per cent of the total sown area. The medium cultivator, numerically two-fifths of the cultivators, has less than a third of the sown area under him. There is an even steeper descent when we come to the small cultivator, his sown area is just a little more than a tenth of the total area sown by the cultivators ”.<sup>5</sup>

Land concentration, predominance of uneconomic holdings, a third of the agricultural population reduced to the level of agricultural labourers, a large portion of the non-agricultural rural population also living in a precarious condition, dependent on the prosperity of agriculture, and, further, a substantial section of even the agricultural owners and agricultural tenants on medium or small sized farms desperately struggling for survival on meagre agricultural production—such has been the picture of rural social life in India.

Provision of employment for millions of peasants who are unemployed but whose unemployment is disguised, as also for the ruined and unemployed non-agricultural section of the rural people ; adequate wage for the agricultural labourers ; proprietary rights and economic units of cultivation for the tenants ; and economic holdings for the lower and middle strata of peasantry, along with proper credit facilities, marketing opportunities, suitable conditions for growing crops in a manner which would enable them to compete favourably with the prosperous and rich farmers—these are some of the fundamental requirements of a vast section of the rural people. In addition to these, they need to be provided with better transport and marketing facilities. In short, the fundamental task confronting the new government was to provide proper opportunities to all agricultural producers to compete on equal terms in the market.

As Chester Bowles very aptly sums up ‘Land inequality

is a bottleneck clogging the creative energy of the people ; a bottleneck that must be broken ”<sup>6</sup> and further “ Land reform is not a solution of course ; it is the first essential step to agricultural improvement, to consolidation of fragmented holdings and to the development of village co-operatives ”.<sup>7</sup>

#### MEASURES ADOPTED BY THE GOVERNMENT OF THE INDIAN UNION

The government of the Indian Union has adopted a number of measures to reconstruct rural social life. They can broadly fall into the following categories :

(a) *Measures affecting Political Life, their Impact :*

The granting of universal franchise to the people by the state has been one of the most significant events. Millions of individuals, irrespective of caste, rank, sex or any other differentiation, have secured the right to vote. Thus the entire rural population has been brought into the political whirlpool. Of the two hundred million voters, the overwhelming majority belong to the rural areas. The picture and some of the results of the first election are now available. Implications of such elections in generating various currents have now become more distinct. The very organization brought into being for conducting elections in 1951 had great impact on the rural people. Ninety thousand polling stations were established ; 224,000 polling booths built. A systematic campaign was launched to explain the mechanics of voting to the people. Balloting was spread over one hundred days. Voting by party symbols printed on voting papers of different colours was evolved to suit the illiterate masses. Symbols having caste or religious significance were not permitted. About 1,800 candidates contested the 497 seats in the House of People, and over 15,000 candidates for the 3,283 seats in twenty-two assemblies. Numerous parties had secular politico-economic programmes. Numerous minor parties on provincial level sprang up. A total of 106 million people voted in the elections.

This single measure of the government generated powerful social and political ferment in rural India, the implications of which are too profound to be fully comprehended. It exposed

the rural populations to the battery of ideas formulated in their programmes by various political parties and groups. It created a new type of social and cultural climate and process. Political discussions, meetings, processions and demonstrations were unprecedented events, new phenomena in the life of the countryside. The election processes agitated extensively for the first time the almost inert life of the rural people and created a new mobility, physical, mental and emotional, among them. It created conditions for the rise of numerous institutions of political, economic and cultural significance, some of them progressive, others reactionary (caste, communal, semi-feudal social and economic, and others). During the elections, economic issues came to the forefront and divergent class interests were revealed. Even propaganda carried on to work up caste sentiments had to resort to distinct economic appeals. Even voting on the basis of caste loyalties disclosed that specific castes usually aligned with specific political and economic parties. It is unfortunate that sociological and anthropological literature which is mounting up in India has not paid proper attention to this aspect of the contemporary rural life almost electrified by the elections and resultant mass political awakening of the rural people.

The effects of this development on different age groups, different sexes, different castes and provincial groups, as well as on different classes have to be assessed. It has created a situation, a climate, in which various ideologies and outlooks, passions and emotions, will ally, clash, modify one another or even result into various amalgams. In centuries of its existence, the rural community never lived such rich turbulent life, never experienced such unique events. The entry of the rural millions in the orbit of active politics as a result of the grant of universal suffrage and elections is a veritable new point of departure in the history of rural society pregnant with incalculable possibilities.

(b) *Measures affecting economic life :*

The government of the Indian Union has taken various measures to reconstruct the economy of India on the basis of what it describes as the principle of Mixed Economy. To reconstruct rural economy it has adopted measures which can be broadly classified into the following categories :

- (a) *Measures to extend and improve the extant agriculture*
  - (i) Reclamation of certain lands for cultivation.
  - (ii) Construction of major and minor Irrigation Projects some of them of multipurpose nature.
  - (iii) Production of improved seeds, fertilizers, and tools as well as insecticides.
- (b) *Measures to reform land relations*
  - (i) Vesting of the estates of the intermediaries (*Zamindars, Taluqdars* and others) barring certain properties such as home farm lands, homesteads and others in the state on the basis of payments of compensation to the intermediaries.
  - (ii) Placing of limitations on future acquisitions of lands by different classes of people.
  - (iii) Tenancy Reforms designed to reduce rents, give security against eviction, and give tenants an opportunity to acquire permanent rights over the land by payment of fixed compensation subject to landlord's right to resume cultivation of a certain area for his personal cultivation.
  - (iv) Restrictions on sale and mortgage, letting and sub-letting of lands.
- (c) *Measures to protect farmers from the oppression of Creditors*
  - (i) Numerous measures to regulate private money-lending.
  - (ii) Measures to scale down debts, etc.
- (d) *Measure to bring all round development of rural areas, resulting in the strengthening of the national economy as a whole*
  - (i) Establishment of Community Development Blocks and National Extension Services.
- (e) *Measures creating new organizations to assist the process of the betterment of the life of the rural people*
  - (i) Establishment of Co-operative Societies, *Vikas Mandals*, *Gaon* or *Gram* (Village) Panchayats as well as *Nyaya Panchayats*.
- (f) *Measures to assist some of the small-scale and cottage industries in Rural India.*

We shall briefly indicate the effects of these measures on rural life of the people as well as their impact on different classes of rural society.

No measures have been evolved which would provide employment on a sufficient scale to solve even to a reasonable extent this major problem of the rural society, or which would give better conditions of living or land to the agricultural workers comprising about one third of the agrarian population. As David G. Mandelbaum has rightly pointed out "The lowest castes, those who are mainly landless labourers, often gain nothing at all from the irrigation projects and the redistribution of land. They have nothing to begin with, nothing which can be improved, no means of getting an economic start and so they remain economically as well as socially disadvantaged. The gap between them and other villagers frequently widens rather than diminishes on account of development projects."<sup>8</sup>

As irrigation facilities, seeds, fertilizers and improved tools, are not given gratis but are to be paid for, the advantages of these facilities are taken predominantly by those who have financial resources to purchase them. As the Community Project Evaluation Report points out the advantage is taken mainly by substantial farmers.<sup>9</sup>

The measures to abolish intermediaries suffer from two basic defects. The compensation to be paid to the intermediaries runs to 550 crores. It is a huge burden on the community. These measures also permit large tracts of land to remain in the hands of *Zamindars* and others as personal property. Further, as the compensation to be paid by tenants is very heavy, only substantial tenants can purchase proprietary titles over the lands taken from the intermediaries.

With regard to tenancy legislation it may be observed that "About 50 per cent of tenants on small plots, where fleecing by landlords can be as serious as on large, were not covered" and further, tenancy regulations are unworkable because the landlord is still left in a powerful position", and still further "Ever since tenancy legislation has been first talked about, the alert landowners had been carrying out widespread evictions in order to remove many of the occupancy claims".<sup>10</sup>

Measures adopted to check the ravages of the moneylenders



have hardly borne fruit. The report of the Rural Credit Survey very convincingly brings this out. These measures have been effectively circumvented and the moneylender is still supreme as he alone holds the key to finance necessary for meeting both the consumption and the production needs of the lower strata of the rural society.

Institutions established by the government like Co-operatives, Vikas Mandals, Gram Panchayats and Nyaya Panchayats are also assisting in practice only the richer sections of the rural population and are further controlled by them. The Community Project Evaluation Report very significantly discloses this in the following words: "When one considers the pattern of membership in village organizations, be they co-operative societies, Vikas Mandals, Gram Panchayats or Nyaya Panchayats, one clearly finds that the membership is confined to the larger cultivators and that the smaller cultivators as well as agricultural labourers have practically no stake in the organization of the village".<sup>11</sup>

With regard to the Community Development Projects and their impact on rural life, the Evaluation Report has brought to light the following facts :—

(a) The advantages of improvements are taken predominantly by substantial farmers. (b) The contributions to be made by the village people are felt as very burdensome by the lower sections of the people. (c) The organizations emerging in these areas for bringing about rural changes are dominated by upper sections of the rural population, the poorer ones having "no stake in them". (d) The initial enthusiasm born of great hopes in the projects is slowly declining among the lower strata of the population.

#### GROWTH OF SOCIAL CLEAVAGE IN RURAL AREAS

To sum up, as a result of the government measures to reconstruct economic life of the rural people, great changes have taken place in the socio-economic structure of the rural society. Some of the old classes (feudal and semi-feudal) have been largely crippled ; some (substantial farmers) have been strengthened.

Middle and lower sections have not benefited. The process of economic disintegration of these sections is advancing.

(i) The measures have resulted in transforming many *zamindari* type of landlords into a class of substantial farmers and capitalist agriculturists. (ii) By numerous tenancy and other laws referred to above, the government is helping to create a class of prosperous peasants out of substantial tenants or a section of the medium-sized cultivators.

This class of prosperous peasants alone can take advantage of the numerous facilities, such as improved seeds, better fertilizers, irrigation, efficient tools, better roads and also improved marketing facilities, thereby improving their production and sale of the product.

On the other hand, the vast mass of unemployed persons, large sections of the owners of uneconomic holdings, the mass of poor peasants and agricultural labourers, either remain unaffected by these measures or are adversely affected.

A sharp conflict of interests and a resultant social cleavage are developing in the rural areas as a result of the measures of the government, Central and State. On one side there are prosperous peasants, landlords, village moneylenders and traders and the richer sections of the rural people. On the other, the middle and small cultivators, the mass of land labourers and ruined non-agrarian population.

As observed earlier, social castes and economic classes are closely correlated. As a result of this, the conflicts of these classes even take the form of conflicts of castes. Thus rural areas are seething with new caste tensions, sometimes visible in elections, sometimes in economic struggles, sometimes in the struggles in local organizations.

These new patterns of tensions are slowly emerging in the open. The tensions are becoming more widespread and are moving in the direction of sharper conflicts.

### CONCLUSION

The rural life of India is undergoing transformation under the impact of Government Measures. The types of changes that are taking place have been narrated in their broadest outline. What will be the direction and tempo of these

changes? Will the democratic political objective fit in with the newly emerging class and social antagonisms in Rural India? Will Indian rural social life experience another round of tensions and antagonisms? Can these contradictions be resolved without changing the very motif and mode of production? What institutional transformation will be required to establish both economic prosperity and social harmony in the rural life? These are some of the fundamental questions posed before all social scientists.

The rural change that is generated by the Government measures is tending to sharpen the contradictions among various classes in rural society and in the context of caste and other institutional background is slowly unleashing tensions, antagonisms and collisions, the implications of which have to be properly comprehended if the direction of the development of one-fifth of mankind is to be assessed and influenced.

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